



MCC LIBRARY FACT SHEET

MAY 23, 2025

DREAMTIME AT THE 'G

AFL 2025 Round 11

ESSENDON V RICHMOND

SELECT INDIGENOUS BOMBERS AND TIGERS AT THE MCG

The Australian Football League (AFL) and its antecedent, the Melbourne and Geelong-based Victorian Football League (VFL), has been the strongest and wealthiest Australian football competition throughout the twentieth century and since. However, the AFL lists just 23 Aborigines who had played in the VFL/AFL prior to the 1980s. Thereafter the number of Indigenous Australians playing at the elite level had accelerated until it exceeded 10% of the AFL player cohort in 2007. Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders comprise about 2.5% of Australia's population but over the last decade these communities have provided about 11% to 12% of the AFL's playing roster. To the end of the 2025 season the AFL has recognised 330 Indigenous VFL/AFL players. As the growth in their numbers coincided with the implementation of the VFL/AFL's ground rationalisation policy that has been applied from the early 1980s, in which games were directed away from local suburban grounds to modern stadia such as the MCG, a large number of these players have played at the MCG. In 2025 there are 63 players who identify as Indigenous on AFL club lists, 8% of the AFL player roster, while there are 20 Indigenous players listed in the elite women's competition, AFLW. The following Essendon and Richmond footballers were chosen in the Indigenous Team of the Century. All played in grand finals at the MCG.

- **Norm McDonald** played 20 games on the MCG for Essendon from 1947 to 1953. Born in Richmond, the Gunditjmara ex-World War II serviceman was the Dons' best and fairest player in 1951 and played in their 1949 and 1950 premiership teams. He was chosen on a half-back flank in the Indigenous Team of the Century.
- **Maurice Rioli Snr.** was the first Indigenous Norm Smith Medallist, being judged the best on ground in the 1982 grand final. A Tiwi Islander, Rioli played for St Mary's in Darwin before being recruited by South Fremantle. Enticed to Melbourne, he played 58 VFL/AFL matches for Richmond on the MCG from 1982 to 1987. Rioli captained the All-Australian Aboriginal team at the MCG in 1985. He also captained Western Australia's State of Origin team against Victoria in 1987, and the Northern Territory State of Origin team in the 1988 Bicentennial Carnival in Adelaide. In 1992 he played for a Tiwi Islands' team against a Kimberly team. Rioli was chosen in the centre for the Indigenous Team of the Century.
- **Michael Long** played 190 matches for Essendon, including 91 on the MCG. He played in the Bombers' 1993 and 2000 premiership sides and won the Norm Smith Medal in 1993. He kicked the Channel 7 World of Sport Goal of the Year in the same match. He was chosen on a wing in the Indigenous Team of the Century. His stance against being racially abused by an opponent in the 1996 ANZAC Day match at the MCG led directly to the establishment of the AFL's anti-vilification rules.
- **Gavin Wanganeen** was the first Indigenous player to win the Brownlow Medal (1993). He played in two premierships – with Essendon in 1993 and Port Adelaide in 2004. He played 86 matches on the MCG. He was chosen on a half-back flank in the Indigenous Team of the Century.

BLACK LIVES MATTER AND “TAKING THE KNEE” ON THE MCG

For Round 2, 2020, AFL footballers at all 18 clubs were “taking the knee” before their matches in support of the global Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. It was a player-led initiative, albeit exercised with the AFL's approval. This practice was inspired by athletes in the United States kneeling during the national anthem to respectfully protest the deaths of African Americans at the hands of police. The BLM movement in the Australian context highlighted Aboriginal deaths in custody too. Footballers were “taking the knee” on at least three occasions at the MCG. A Richmond reserves team were “taking the knee” on June 10 against Collingwood's seconds, and the following evening both the Richmond and Collingwood AFL sides were “taking the knee” for their Round 2 match on Thursday June 11. This match relaunched the AFL competition after it was suspended on March 22 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. While the “taking the knee” practice lasted one weekend at other venues, Richmond and Hawthorn players were also “taking the knee” before their Round 3 AFL match at the MCG on June 18. Although these matches were played in a closed stadium, due to social distancing restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, the players' protests at these AFL games were broadcast nationally and covered extensively in the media.

DREAMTIME AT THE 'G

This annual fixture between Essendon and Richmond acknowledges and celebrates the role of indigenous Australians in football. The combined colours of Richmond (yellow and black) and Essendon (red and black) coincidentally match the Aboriginal flag (red, yellow and black) and are seen to add symbolism to the event. The Dreamtime at the 'G was first held on a Saturday afternoon in July 2005 as a part of National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week events but has been played at night since 2006. That year the Yiooken Award (pronounced yie-yoo-ken) was inaugurated and presented to the player judged best on ground. Yiooken means “dreaming” in the Woi wurrung language of the Wurundjeri people.

From 2007 the AFL has promoted an Indigenous Round which incorporated the Dreamtime at the 'G match. In 2016 the round was renamed the Sir Doug Nicholls Round. Since 2006 the Dreamtime match has been associated with former Essendon champion Michael Long's The Long Walk Trust, a charity inspired by Long's walk from Melbourne to Canberra in 2004 that raised awareness of social issues affecting indigenous Australians.

			Home Team		Away Team		Crowd	Yiooken Award
2005	July 9	Rd 15	Richmond	14.8 (92)	Essendon	9.12 (66)	49,975	-
2006	May 6	Rd 6	Essendon	13.17 (95)	Richmond	13.19 (97)	58,439	Dean Polo (Rich)
2007	May 26	Rd 9	Richmond	12.12 (84)	Essendon	12.20 (92)	61,837	James Hird (Ess)
2008	May 24	Rd 9	Essendon	10.12 (72)	Richmond	16.14 (110)	60,333	Nathan Foley (Rich)
2009	May 23	Rd 9	Richmond	12.13 (85)	Essendon	19.11 (125)	73,625	Jason Winderlich (Ess)
2010	May 22	Rd 9	Essendon	19.16 (130)	Richmond	14.11 (95)	64,709	David Hille (Ess)
2011	May 21	Rd 9	Richmond	16.9 (105)	Essendon	13.11 (89)	83,563	Trent Cotchin (Rich)
2012	May 19	Rd 8	Essendon	19.14 (128)	Richmond	15.19 (109)	80,900	Brett Deledio (Rich)
2013	May 25	Rd 9	Richmond	9.8 (62)	Essendon	13.13 (91)	84,234	Jobe Watson (Ess)
2014	May 31	Rd 11	Essendon	15.14 (104)	Richmond	7.12 (54)	74,664	Brendon Goddard (Ess)
2015	May 30	Rd 9	Richmond	10.12 (72)	Essendon	8.11 (59)	83,804	Brandon Ellis (Rich)
2016	May 28	Rd 10	Essendon	10.7 (67)	Richmond	16.9 (105)	56,948	Dustin Martin (Rich)
2017	May 27	Rd 10	Richmond	11.15 (81)	Essendon	10.6 (66)	85,656	Dustin Martin (Rich)
2018	June 2	Rd 11	Essendon	6.7 (43)	Richmond	17.12 (114)	81,046	Shane Edwards (Rich)
2019	May 25	Rd 10	Richmond	10.13 (73)	Essendon	6.14 (50)	80,176	Bachar Houli (Rich)
2022	May 21	Rd 10	Richmond	11.14 (80)	Essendon	7.6 (48)	70,226	Dion Prestia (Rich)
2023	May 20	Rd 10	Essendon	10.11 (71)	Richmond	10.10 (70)	78,300	Zach Merrett (Ess)
2024	May 25	Rd 11	Richmond	10.14 (74)	Essendon	12.14 (86)	79,359	Jordan Ridley (Ess)

DREAMTIME NOT AT THE 'G

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 and 2021 Dreamtime matches could not be staged in Melbourne. Therefore, the Round 10 match between Richmond and Essendon that was to be played at the MCG on May 23, 2020, was delayed to August 22 for the Round 13 Doug Nicholls Round, and moved to Darwin's Marrara Oval. The evening was also commercially branded “Dreamtime in Darwin”. The June 5, 2021, match between the clubs in Round 12 was also relocated, this time to Perth Stadium and dubbed “Dreamtime in the West” or “Dreamtime in Perth”. Both were trumpeted as televisual and ceremonial successes despite their modest attendances. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the last time a league match drew less than 5,500 to the MCG, as Marrara Oval had, was when 5,084 saw Melbourne play North Melbourne in Round 18, 1935. While Perth Stadium's capacity was unrestricted for its Dreamtime match, it drew a smaller crowd than all but the inaugural Dreamtime at the 'G.

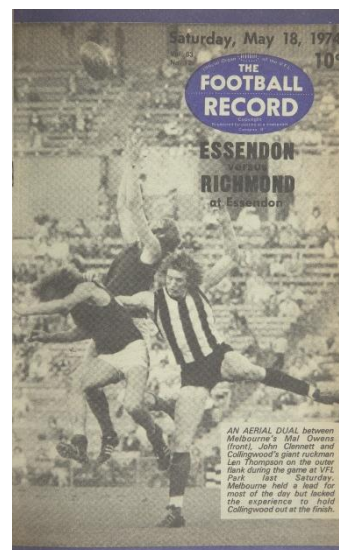
			Home Team		Away Team		Venue	Crowd	Yiooken Award
2020	Aug 22	Rd 13	Essendon	10.1 (61)	Richmond	10.13 (73)	Marrara	5,401	Shai Bolton (Rich)
2021	June 5	Rd 12	Essendon	12.12 (84)	Richmond	19.9 (123)	Perth Stad.	55,656	Darcy Parish (Ess)

THE KEVIN SHEEDY TROPHY

Inaugurated in 1998, the Kevin Sheedy Trophy, a crystal vase, is for perpetual competition between Essendon and Richmond. It was established “...in recognition of Kevin's service for both clubs”. Sheedy was a three-time Richmond premierships player and four-time Essendon premierships coach, who has championed Indigenous footballers at all levels and was largely responsible for the Dreamtime at the 'G concept. The trophy was retired in 2013 but in 2014 it was revived for the games between the sides other than the Dreamtime at the 'G match.

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

In Round 7, 1974, Richmond and the Dons met in the infamous “Battle of Windy Hill”. The match took place on 18 May before a crowd of 24,376 (a *Football Record* for the match is pictured). The result was close with Richmond 16.19 (115) defeating Essendon 15.15 (105). However, it was better remembered for the brawl as players and staff headed towards the dressing rooms at half time. Seven players and officials were charged by the League, with six receiving suspensions. Essendon’s trainer, Laurie Ashley, who copped the blame for starting the ugly affair, received six weeks, as did Essendon’s fitness trainer, Jim Bradley, and Essendon’s hard-man, Ron Andrews. John Cassin was found not guilty. For Richmond, Mal Brown received one week and Stephen Parsons copped four, while the Tigers’ secretary, Graeme Richmond, was disqualified for the season and fined \$2,000. However, the fine was later rescinded by the VFL. Mal Brown wrote a colourful description of what he called the “Riot at Windy Hill” in his autobiography *Mongrels I’ve Met* (1994) pp.121-136.



GRAND FINALS BETWEEN THE TEAMS

The 1942 Grand Final.

Essendon had finished on top of the ladder with 12 wins and three losses, while Richmond were in second position with 11 wins and four losses. At Princes Park, in front of a war-time crowd of 49,000, the Bombers won convincingly with a score of 19.18 (132) to Richmond’s 11.13 (79). The Tigers were hot favourites but in a rather spiteful game where six players were reported, the Dons led at every change and after kicking three quick goals at the start of the last quarter coasted to their seventh League premiership, winning by 53 points. Main goal-kickers for the winners were: Gordon “Whoppa” Lane (6), Dick Reynolds (4) and Jack Cassin (3), while goal-kickers for the vanquished were Richard Harris (3), Jack Dyer and Jack “Skinny” Titus each kicking two. Best on the ground was Essendon’s captain/coach Dick Reynolds while Laurie Dearle, Ern “Sonny” Coward, Gordon Abbott and Wally Buttsworth were other worthy contributors for the Dons. Richmond’s best were Leo Merrett, Ray Steele, Danny Guinane and Bert Edwards.

The 1943 Grand Final.

Richmond finished on top of the ladder with 10 wins and five losses while Essendon, second on percentage, also had ten wins and five losses. Played at Princes Park before a war-time crowd of 42,100. Richmond reversed the 1942 result with a five-point win over Essendon. It was the smallest grand final margin in twenty-two years. In a thrilling match, the last quarter was highlighted by two Jack Dyer goals, a nail-biting struggle and a last-ditch effort by the Dons falling just metres short. The goal kickers for Richmond were Richard Harris (7) and Jack Dyer (3). For Essendon, Tom Reynolds kicked seven goals and Hugh Torney two. The best for Richmond were Richard Harris, Jack Dyer, William “Polly” Perkins, Leo Merrett, Bob Bawden and Max Oppy while the Dons were best served by Tom Reynolds, Gordon “Whoppa” Lane, Cec. Ruddell, Jack Cassin, Dick Reynolds and Wally Buttsworth. In a close encounter, Richmond 12.14 (86) defeated Essendon 11.15 (81).

OVER TO YOU

1. Who am I? I was an Essendon (1994-2001) player and Port Adelaide representative (2002-2004). At Essendon I was a premiership player in 2000 and at Port Adelaide I was a premiership player in 2004. I coached the Tigers from 2010 to mid-2023, this included flags in 2017, 2019 and 2020.
2. Who am I? I was a Tiger from 1988 to 2002 where I won the best and fairest award in 1990 and 1992. I was the Richmond captain from 1997 to 2000. I coached Essendon from 2008 to 2010.
3. Who am I? I was a Richmond player from 1967 to 1979. In 1976 I won the club’s best and fairest award. I played in the 1969, 1973 and 1974 Richmond premiership sides. I captained the Tigers in 1978. At Essendon I coached from 1981 to 2007, including flags in 1984, 1985, 1993 and 2000.
4. Who am I? My brother played for Melbourne. I played for Richmond (1927-35) and Essendon (1936-37). I left Richmond to become Essendon captain and coach in 1936 but retired as a player during the 1937 season. I continued to coach Essendon until May 1939.
5. Who am I? I played with Richmond from 1972 to 1982 in 209 games (85 goals). I captained the Tigers in 1981 and was a member of Richmond’s premiership sides in 1973, 1974 and 1980. Moving to Essendon in 1983 to 1986 I played in 44 games (12 goals). I was a member of the Bombers’ 1985 premiership side.
6. Who am I? I had a career with Essendon from 2007 to 2010 in 26 games (9 goals). I joined the Tigers from 2011 to 2021, playing 206 games (34 goals). I was a member of Tiger premiership teams in 2017, 2019 and 2020.

THIS ROUND IN HISTORY - ROUND 11 AT THE MCG

The highest Round 11 score at the MCG is 25.11 (161) by Collingwood against St Kilda in 1995. The overall record is 25.29 (179) by Fitzroy against Geelong 8.8 (56) at the Brunswick Street Oval in 1944. The most goals in a Round 11 game at the MCG is 12 by Bob Johnson Snr for Melbourne against Hawthorn in 1933. The overall Round 11 record is 15 by Gordon Coventry for Collingwood against Essendon at Victoria Park in 1933. The highest score in a quarter in this round at the MCG is 10.5 (65) which has been achieved twice, both times by Richmond against Footscray. The first instance was in the third quarter of a 1970 clash and the second in the last quarter in a 1978 match. The overall Round 11 record for the highest score in a quarter is 11.5 (71) by Fitzroy against Geelong in the third quarter at Brunswick Street in 1944. The highest Round 11 attendance at the MCG is 87,653 in 1989 when Geelong defeated Essendon by 54 points. The overall Round 11 attendance record is 92,935 at Waverley Park in 1981 when Hawthorn defeated Collingwood by 46 points.

STATISTICS FOR ESSENDON V RICHMOND

Essendon v Richmond by venue

	Won by Essendon	Won by Richmond	Drawn
Albert Park	0	1	0
East Melbourne	4	8	0
Junction Oval	0	1	0
Marrara Oval	0	1	0
MCG	34	39	1
Perth Stadium	0	1	0
Princes Park	4	2	0
Punt Road Oval	26	22	1
Waverley Park	3	4	1
Windy Hill	35	20	1
	106	99	4

Highest Score

Essendon	25.20 (170)	Rd 2	1960	PR
Richmond	25.22 (172)	Rd 3	1982	MCG

Lowest Score

Essendon	3.4 (22)	Rd 8	1918	EM
Richmond	3.11 (29)	Rd 2	1911	PR

Greatest Winning Margin

Essendon	125 points	Rd 2	1960	PR
Richmond	74 points	Rd 21	1970	MCG
Richmond	74 points	Rd 18	1983	WH

Last Time They Met - Round 11, 2024, MCG

	Richmond	Essendon
Quarter time	3.3	3.3
Half time	6.7	7.7
Three-quarter time	9.10	10.12
Full time	10.14 (74)	12.14 (86)

Most Goals in a Match (10 goals or more)

11	P. Salmon	Ess	Rd 19	1986	Wav
10	D. Harris	Rich	Rd 3	1944	WH
10	J. Coleman	Ess	Rd 18	1953	PR

PLAYED WITH BOTH CLUBS

There have been forty-six players who have appeared with both clubs, here are two of these men.

PAUL SPROULE. Originally from Hobart (TANFL) where he won flags in 1963 and 1964, Paul Sproule was 180cm (5'11") tall and weighed 77.5kg (171lb). He joined Essendon from 1968 to 1971 where he played 60 games and kicked 60 goals. He then moved to the Tigers from 1972 until 1975 where he registered 86 games and 93 goals. At the Tigers he was an important member of the 1973 and 1974 VFL premiership sides. Sproule was an inaugural inductee when the Tasmanian Football Hall of Fame was launched in 2005. In 2016 he was elevated to Icon status. Other honours include membership of the Tasmanian Sporting Hall of Fame and Life Membership at Richmond in 2013.

DAVID BERTRAM MILLER SMITH. Dave Smith's father, George, had been a champion footballer for Carlton from 1877 to 1884, and with Richmond from 1885 to 1888, and in 1890. George Smith was Richmond's inaugural captain. Dave Smith was born in Richmond in 1884, his football senior career began at Essendon, where he played 142 games (114 goals) from 1903 to 1911. He also coached the Dons in 1908 and 1909. In 1911 he captained Essendon to the season's premiership. He later played one match for Richmond in 1914, scoring three goals, and then retired. As a cricketer he toured New Zealand in 1910, and England with the Australians in 1912, where he played in two Test matches; he was a batsman. He died in 1963.

OVER TO YOU ANSWERS:

Q1 Damien Hardwick. Q2 Matthew Knights. Q3 Kevin Sheedy. Q4 Jack Baggott. Q5 Bryan Wood. Q6 Bachar Houli.

FACT SHEETS ON THE MCC WEBSITE

The MCC Library's matchday fact sheets can be accessed through the MCC website at: <http://tinyurl.com/mcccatalogue>

Fact sheets are prepared by MCC Library Volunteers David Allen, Eric Panther, Quentin Miller, Dennis Carroll, Ian Wilkinson, Gaye Fitzpatrick, and Edward Cohen, with MCC Deputy Librarian Trevor Ruddell and the assistance of Col Hutchinson of the AFL.