

The MCC Library Record

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ESSENDON V FOOTSCRAY
1924 CHAMPIONSHIP OF VICTORIA
RETROSPECTIVE

ABOUT THE MCC LIBRARY RECORD

The *MCC Library Record* is an extension of the MCC Library's tradition of providing MCC Members' Reserve patrons with complimentary reading material such as the *MCC Library Fact Sheet*. A retrospective *MCC Library Record* was distributed at AFL grand finals from 2013 through to 2019 and in 2022 and 2023. Each looked at the grand final played 100 years earlier. Due to the COVID-19 outbreaks in Melbourne, and the removal of the 2020 and 2021 grand finals interstate, this practice was interrupted. Your Library instead produced retrospectives of the 1920 and 1921 grand finals for the opening rounds of 2021 and 2022. The MCC Library was glad to resume publishing an *MCC Library Record* for the 2022 AFL grand final. There was no VFL grand final in 1924 but we hope you enjoy reading about the Championship of Victoria match between Essendon and Footscray of a century ago. When in the Members' Reserve you are invited to visit the MCC Library on Level 3 of the Reserve or look out for *MCC Library Fact Sheets* on the MCC website at <http://tinyurl.com/mcclcatalogue>.

THE STATE OF FOOTBALL 100 YEARS AGO

In 1924 the Victorian Football League (VFL) consisted of nine clubs, necessitating a bye each round. Clubs played each other twice (16 matches in total) with the top four clubs at the end of the home-and-away season then competing in a round robin series for the premiership.

Essendon, the minor premier also finished atop the round robin table, making the necessity of playing a grand final redundant. Teams consisted of 18 players and there was no substitution for injured players. Footballers not selected for their VFL team played in the Victorian Junior Football League (VJFL). Geelong's seconds won its second successive VJFL premiership when Essendon's seconds refused to play the VJFL grand final in Geelong.

In 1924 the VFL also established what would become the sport's most prestigious individual award, the Charles Brownlow Medal, for the League's "fairest and best" player as voted by the field umpires. This was won by Geelong's Edward "Carji" Greeves.

The Victorian Football Association (VFA), the state's other senior competition, had 10 clubs. Footscray, the VFA's minor premier, won the final 11.11 (77) to Williamstown's 3.4 (22) before a crowd of 21,000 at Arden Street. In a first, the premiers of the VFA and VFL would meet in a post-season Championship of Victoria match for charity.

In August the Australasian Football Carnival was held in Tasmania, with all 15 matches played at the North Hobart Oval. Teams representing Victoria (VFL), Western Australia, South Australia, New South Wales, Queensland and Tasmania competed with Victoria taking the honours with five wins from five matches. It was a lop-sided tournament that emphasised the gulf in standard between the top three football states (Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia) and the rest.

West Torrens won its first South Australian premiership when it defeated Sturt 9.12 (66) to 8.10 (58) at the Adelaide Oval before 44,345 spectators. This was the largest Australian football crowd of 1924 until bettered by the attendance for the Championship of Victoria. The Western Australian grand final was won by Subiaco 7.9 (51) over East Fremantle 3.6 (24) at Subiaco Oval. Tasmania's state premiership match was played at York Park, Launceston, where Lefroy, the south premiers, 6.3 (39) defeated Launceston, the north premiers, 5.5 (35).



THE 1924 LEAGUE SEASON

The VFL competition consisted of nine teams in 1924. They played each other twice in the home-and-away matches. The top four teams, Essendon (first), South Melbourne (second), Fitzroy (third) and Richmond (fourth), then contested a round-robin finals series.

In 1924 the VFL decided to abandon the *Argus* finals system, used from 1902-23 and again from 1925-30. Apparently, some League administrators successfully argued that as the MCG could only accommodate around 55,000 spectators, some of the 80,000 or so people who attended the four home-away games held each Saturday were deprived of the opportunity of seeing the single game held at the MCG each Saturday under the *Argus* finals system.

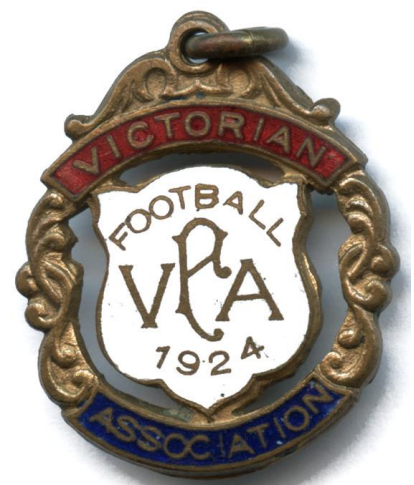
A round-robin series of finals matches enabled the League to schedule two finals matches each Saturday – one at the MCG and one at another ground. During the 1924 finals, games were played at Windy Hill (week 1), Princes Park (week 2) and the Lake Oval (week 3), in addition to the MCG. Nevertheless, neither Essendon nor South Melbourne played a game at their home ground.

In the first week of the finals Essendon defeated Fitzroy by 40 points at the MCG and Richmond beat South Melbourne by 28 points at Windy Hill. The following week, Essendon made it two wins in a row when they defeated South Melbourne by 33 points at the MCG, while Fitzroy defeated Richmond by 20 points at Princes Park. In the final round of matches, South Melbourne defeated Fitzroy by 13 points at the MCG and Richmond beat Essendon by 20 points at the Lake Oval.

Essendon therefore headed the finals table on percentage from Richmond, both having recorded two wins. As Essendon had topped the ladder at the end of the home-and-away rounds and been declared 'minor premiers', they took out the premiership without the need for a further finals game. Had they not headed the finals table, they would have had the right to challenge the table leader to a grand final match. No VFL grand final match was therefore played in 1924.

THE 1924 ASSOCIATION SEASON

The VFA consisted of 10 clubs in 1924. They played each other twice in the 18-round home and away season. The top four teams – Footscray, Williamstown, Northcote and Brunswick – then played in the finals. The *Argus* finals system was used with the second-placed Williamstown defeating the fourth-placed Brunswick in the first week and the top-placed Footscray defeating the third-placed Northcote the following Saturday. Footscray then defeated Williamstown by 45 points in the final. All these matches were played at the North Melbourne Recreation Ground, Arden Street. If Williamstown had won the final, Footscray, as minor premiers, would have been entitled to challenge them to a grand final match.



THE 1924 CHAMPIONSHIP OF VICTORIA MATCH

This match, that pitted VFL premiers Essendon against VFA premiers Footscray, was organised to aid Dame Nellie Melba's Appeal for Limbless and Disabled Soldiers. Therefore, it was really a charity fundraiser that assumed great importance as the means to measure the strength of two rival football bodies. In the *Argus* of Monday, October 6, "Old Boy" (Reg Wilmot) stated that the Association had always been keen to play in such a game, but the League had not been willing "to give its rivals a chance to show their worth". Wilmot added that "it was not until Dame Nellie Melba made an irresistible appeal on behalf of the limbless and disabled soldiers that the League abandoned its policy of aloofness and consented to the match".

Wilmot noted that the fact that Essendon had been able to win the VFL premiership without needing to play a grand final had left a Saturday free for the game and that agitation for the inclusion of Footscray in the League had added interest; "...but the moment it was announced that the match would be for the championship of Victoria its success was assured."

Essendon captain Syd Barker won the toss and his side kicked to the Richmond end of the MCG with the help of a slight breeze. Essendon had the first goal on the board within a minute when Tommy Jenkins scored with a beautiful dropkick. After this, Footscray did most of the attacking but many of their attacks were thwarted by the strong Essendon defence. Making the most of their chances up forward, Essendon scored a second goal, again by Jenkins, before good play by Footscray resulted in goals to Vic Samson and Les Punch. An attack by Essendon toward the end of the quarter led to a goal by Charlie May, which put the VFL side four points up at the first break.

According to Wilmot, the second quarter was a repeat of the first, "full of brilliant football, with Footscray the better side." Nevertheless, Essendon's strong defending continued to limit Footscray's scoring opportunities and their only goal for the quarter was kicked by Tom Mullens. Essendon failed to score a goal during the second term but two late behinds put them in front by a single point at the main break.

Footscray asserted their authority after half time with clever handball leading to Punch scoring their third goal early in the third term. They continued to use handball throughout the term but some of their efforts lead to errors which Essendon failed to capitalise upon. The Dons only managed three behinds for the quarter and a late Footscray goal from Jack O'Brien put them up by two goals at the final break.

The final stanza saw Footscray get right on top after some early chances for Essendon only resulted in three more behinds, a shot by full forward Greg Stockdale hitting the post. Tom McHenry booted Footscray's sixth goal soon after and a "beautiful left-foot shot" from Mullens brought up their seventh. Another goal to McHenry put the game out of Essendon's reach and a late goal to George Shorten was, according to Wilmot, greeted with "hardly a sound".

1924 CHAMPIONSHIP OF VICTORIA TEAMS



ESSENDON (VFL)

Black & Red

Coach: Syd Barker

G B

- 1. Syd Barker (c).....
- 2. Clyde Donaldson.....
- 3. Norm Beckton
- 6. Tom Fitzmaurice
- 7. Harry Hunter.....
- 8. Jimmy Sullivan
- 10. Rowley Watt
- 11. Charlie Farrell.....
- 14. Charlie May.....**1**..
- 15. Roy Laing.....
- 16. Justin McCarthy.....
- 18. Vince Irwin.....
- 21. Tommy Jenkins.....**1**..**1**..
- 24. Frank Maher
- 25. Greg Stockdale.....
- 30. George Shorten.....**1**..
- 31. George Rawle.....
- 33. Charlie Hardy.....
- Rushed.....

¼	½	¾	Final
3 - 1	3 - 5	3 - 8	4 - 12 (36)

Essendon Playing Positions

- B:** Donaldson Irwin Hunter
- HB:** Laing Fitzmaurice Farrell
- C:** Sullivan May Watt
- HF:** Stockdale McCarthy Shorten
- F:** Hardy Jenkins Barker (c)
- Foll:** Beckton Rawle Maher



FOOTSCRAY (VFA)

Red, White & Blue

Coach: Con McCarthy

G B

- 1. Con McCarthy (c).....
- 2. Vic Samson.....**1**..
- 4. Alf Merton.....
- 5. Frans Nielsen
- 7. Alex Eason.....
- 9. Charles "Chooka" Zinnick
- 11. William Doolan.....
- 12. Rupert Gibb.....
- 13. Norman Ford
- 14. Bill McIntyre.....
- 15. Jack Meuleman.....
- 16. Les Punch.....**1**..**11**..
- 17. Allan Hopkins.....
- 20. Wally Fraser.....
- 23. Tom Mullens.....**1**..**1**..
- 25. Jack O'Brien.....**1**..
- 27. Colin Laidlaw.....
- 30. Tom McHenry.....**1**..**1**..
- Rushed.....

¼	½	¾	Final
2 - 3	3 - 4	5 - 8	9 - 10 (64)

Footscray Playing Positions

- B:** Doolan Meuleman Fraser
- HB:** Nielsen Ford McIntyre
- C:** Merton Laidlaw Gibb
- HF:** Hopkins O'Brien McHenry
- F:** Zinnick Mullens Punch
- Foll:** McCarthy (c) Samson Eason

1924 VFL LADDER AFTER THE HOME-AND-AWAY SEASON

	TEAM	Played	Won	Lost	Drawn	For	Against	Percent	Points
1	Essendon	16	11	4	1	1208	918	131.6	46
2	South Melbourne	16	11	5	-	1131	971	116.5	44
3	Fitzroy	16	10	6	-	1224	1092	112.1	40
4	Richmond	16	10	6	-	1083	1057	102.5	40
5	Geelong	16	8	8	-	1116	1041	107.2	32
6	Collingwood	16	8	8	-	1089	1134	96.0	32
7	Carlton	16	5	10	1	1134	1228	92.3	22
8	Melbourne	16	4	12	-	1043	1252	83.3	16
9	St Kilda	16	4	12	-	1045	1380	75.7	16

1924 VFL FINALS TABLE AFTER THE ROUND ROBIN

	TEAM	Played	Won	Lost	Drawn	For	Against	Percent	Points
1	Essendon	3	2	1	-	177	124	142.7	8
2	Richmond	3	2	1	-	208	180	115.6	8
3	Fitzroy	3	1	2	-	167	200	83.5	4
4	South Melbourne	3	1	2	-	182	230	79.1	4

1924 VFA LADDER AFTER THE HOME-AND-AWAY SEASON

	TEAM	Played	Won	Lost	Drawn	For	Against	Percent	Points
1	Footscray	18	16	1	1	1484	916	162.0	66
2	Williamstown	18	13	5	-	1197	944	126.8	52
3	Northcote	18	11	6	1	1315	1176	111.8	46
4	Brunswick	18	11	7	-	1380	1016	135.8	44
5	North Melbourne	18	10	8	-	1282	1025	125.1	40
6	Hawthorn	18	10	8	-	1283	1058	121.3	40
7	Port Melbourne	18	10	8	-	1277	1179	108.3	40
8	Geelong (Assoc.)	18	4	14	-	933	1485	62.8	16
9	Brighton	18	2	16	-	1090	1422	76.7	8
10	Prahran	18	2	16	-	797	1818	43.8	8

1924 VFA FINALS

1st Semi Final: Williamstown 8.9 (57) def. Brunswick 5.16 (46). **2nd Semi Final:** Footscray 9.7 (61) def. Northcote 4.8 (32). **Final:** Footscray 11.11 (77) def. Williamstown 3.4 (22).

1924 Championship of Victoria Umpires

Field: J. McMurray Sr. (VFL) & J. Leheny (VFA)

Boundary: Davies (VFL) & Amy (VFA)

Goal: Monohan (VFL) & McKenry (VFA)

Curtain Raiser

St Kilda (VFL)	19	16	130
Newtown (NSW)	8	11	59

“CARJI” GREEVES AND THE FIRST BROWNLOW

On March 1, 1924, the *Age* reported that at an ordinary meeting of the Victorian Football League (VFL) the previous evening:

A resolution was passed tendering sympathy to the widow of the late Mr. Charles Brownlow, who, as vice-president of the council and secretary of the Geelong Club, had rendered yeoman service to the League. Mr E.W. Copeland (Collingwood) recommended that in order to perpetuate the name of the late Mr. Brownlow, a medal should be presented each year to the best and fairest player in the League. This was agreed to unanimously.

Charles Brownlow had been a player for Geelong prior to the establishment of the VFL in 1897. He was the club's secretary from 1885 to 1923 and its delegate to the VFL Board from 1902 to 1922. He served as VFL Vice-President and its delegate to the Australian Football Council from 1911 to 1916 and chaired the VFL's permit and umpires committee from 1911 to 1922. He was the caretaker president of the VFL in 1918 and 1919. Brownlow died on January 24, 1924.

In the *Herald* on April 24, it was explained that the winner of the Brownlow Medal would be determined by “the votes of the field umpires, who are being supplied with forms on which they will write the name of the player whom they consider the best each Saturday. These records will be forwarded in sealed envelopes to the Secretary of the League and will not be opened until the end of the season. Umpires have been told that they must not discuss with anybody the name or merits of the players they may vote for.”

On September 19, the votes cast for the Brownlow Medal were counted by the permit and umpires committee. The *Australasian* reported that “the successful player” was the Geelong centreman, Edward “Carji” Greeves, who gained seven votes (only one vote was cast until 1930 when the current 3-2-1 system was introduced). Equal second were Bert Chadwick (Melbourne) and George Shorten (Essendon) with six votes each. Seventy-two votes were cast during the season with 37 players receiving one or more votes. In addition to Greeves, Chadwick and Shorten, 13 players received two or more votes, while 21 players received one vote.

Born on November 1, 1903, Edward Goderich Greeves Jr was nicknamed “Carji” when he was a baby by a friend of the Greeves family. The name was probably derived from a character in a popular play of the time. His family moved to the Geelong area when he was a child and he attended The Geelong College, where he was a champion sportsman, excelling in football, cricket tennis and rowing. It was not until after his schooldays that he joined Geelong. From 1923 to 1933 he played 124 games and kicked 17 goals for Geelong. At 175cm (5ft 9in) and a playing weight of 76kg (12 stone), he was not a particularly speedy player, but he had great anticipation, was a good mark and could kick well with either foot. He was a member of Geelong's premiership teams in 1925 and 1931 and represented Victoria a number of times. He was selected in the centre in Geelong's Team of the Century and was an inaugural inductee in the AFL Hall of Fame (1996). Geelong's annual best and fairest award is named in his honour.

In the late 1920s Greeves spent some time in southern California (United States), where he coached college gridiron players in kicking. A severe knee injury in 1930 hampered the final years of his VFL career; he played only 13 games after the 1929 season and did not play at all in 1932. Greeves suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis and emphysema from the 1930s and died in 1963 at the age of 59.

FITZMAURICE AND THE BRIBERY SCANDAL

Tom Fitzmaurice played 85 games for Essendon between 1918 and 1924. He was a member of the Dons' 1923 and 1924 premiership sides, but after their defeat by Footscray in the 1924 Championship of Victoria match, he never played for Essendon again. He moved first to Geelong, where he played 49 games from 1925 to 1928, and was a member of their 1925 premiership side. He was then captain-coach of North Melbourne from 1932 to 1935, playing a further 54 VFL games.

Eleven years after Essendon lost the Championship of Victoria game to Footscray, Fitzmaurice wrote an article in the *Sporting Globe* (June 1, 1935) in which he suggested that the game had been "A Frame-Up". Although no names were mentioned, the article suggested that some Essendon players had taken bribes not to perform in this game. Fitzmaurice wrote that he was "disgusted" by the efforts of these players and vowed never to play for Essendon again, which he didn't.

In another article in the *Sporting Globe* two days later, Fitzmaurice's Essendon teammate Charlie Hardy backed his claims and went further by suggesting that in the last of Essendon's 1924 VFL finals games against Richmond "things were far from right". In the aftermath of the Essendon versus Footscray game, there had been rumours that fights had broken out in the Essendon dressing rooms after the match and Hardy suggested that "things were anything but harmonious" in the rooms after the game.

While Old Boy's report on the championship game in the *Argus* on October 6, 1924, included a comment that "passengers predominated" in the Essendon side, it also mentioned that Essendon's Secretary, Mr Frank Reid, had strongly denied that there had been any trouble between his players. In addition, Reid was reported as saying that Essendon had been "beaten by a better side".

In an article in the *ASSH Bulletin* in 1999, titled "The 1924 Championship Game: Did the Dons play dead?", Dale Blair argued that it was unlikely that the match was 'fixed' as suggested by Fitzmaurice and Hardy. He concluded his article:

The suggestion that Essendon players accepted payments to play dead relies solely on the word of two players. Fitzmaurice and Hardy may have held a genuine conviction that some of their team-mates let them down. Although Essendon clearly played poorly, the match reports of the day, even though not conclusive on the assessment of personal performances, indicate that the effort of the majority of Essendon players was acceptable and that the Footscray team was superb. A decided lack of evidence undermines the Fitzmaurice/Hardy claims. Nor can we be sure of the circumstances that actuated their accusations eleven years after the event. Given the lack of substantive proof one can only conclude that on Saturday, 4 October 1924, at the MCG, Footscray was genuinely the better side.

Despite Blair's comments, suspicion remains about the performance of the Essendon side. Were the allegations that Essendon players took bribes just the result of 'sour grapes' following the defeat of the VFL premiers in a game they were expected to win? Or were Fitzmaurice and Hardy right in suggesting that the game was a "fraud"?

RUMOURS OF LEAGUE EXPANSION

Following the withdrawal of University after the 1914 season, the VFL consisted on nine teams. Nevertheless, while all nine teams competed in 1915, the outbreak of the First World War caused the withdrawal of a number of clubs in 1916, leaving only Collingwood, Carlton Richmond and Fitzroy to compete for the premiership. South Melbourne and Geelong rejoined the competition in 1917 and Essendon and St Kilda in 1918. It was only in 1919, however, when Melbourne rejoined that a nine-team competition was reinstated.

During the period 1919 to 1924, the League received a number of applications from VFA clubs to join the competition but these were rejected mainly because the admission of a VFA club would disrupt the district-based recruiting scheme introduced by the VFL in 1915 and because, in 1923, the VFA and VFL had signed a five-year agreement whereby both bodies recognised the validity of the other's transfer clearances. Therefore, if the League admitted a VFA club it was likely some of its current members would object because part of their recruiting district would be taken away and there was also the prospect that players from any VFA club that transferred to the VFL might have their clearances to play in the League rejected by the VFA.

In the middle of 1924, the Public Service Football Club, whose players were to be drawn entirely from state and federal public servants, and not from a geographical district, was formed and it applied to join the VFL. A company known as Melbourne Carnivals Ltd, which had the backing of local entrepreneur John Wren, offered to lease its newly developed ground – the Amateur Sports Ground (later known as the Motordrome and still later as Olympic Park) – to the Public Service Club if they were admitted to the League. This ground was centrally located between Batman Avenue and Swan Street and the League was keen to gain control of it, rather than have it controlled by the VFA, or interests associated with other winter codes such as soccer or rugby league. In September 1924 the League formally resolved to draw up a scheme to admit one or more new clubs and secure the Amateur Sports Ground for its use.

While the problems associated with the League's recruiting scheme and its transfer agreement with the VFA made the addition of a club from the VFA to League problematic, the inclusion of the Public Service Club caused no such problems and had the added bonus of securing the Amateur Sports Ground for the League. Nevertheless, Melbourne Carnivals Ltd eventually withdrew its offer for use of the ground by the Public Service Club. The Public Service Club subsequently applied for admission to the VFA but could not secure an alternative venue so withdrew from the VFA without playing a game. The VFL did not, therefore, secure control of the Amateur Sports Ground and the VFA eventually began using it as a finals venue.

Development plans for the ground never came fully to fruition, however, and it did not become a major venue for football in Melbourne.

A decision by the VFA to admit Coburg from the VFL seconds competition to its competition in late 1924 was interpreted by the League as breaking the 1923 transfer agreement because it contended that this was valid only while the membership of the two bodies remained the same as it was when the agreement was signed. The VFA decided not to pursue a legal challenge and, after 1924, both bodies considered the "agreement" null and void. From this time, the League set about admitting an additional club from the VFA. Both Footscray and North Melbourne, which had had considerable success in the VFA, were strong contenders but their applications were rejected

initially because this would reduce the recruiting districts established for the current nine VFL clubs. A proposal to admit three new clubs was looked upon more favourably, however, because the League considered that the loss of recruiting districts would be more evenly spread across existing clubs. In addition, the VFL believed that the admission of a number of “strong” VFA clubs to the League would strengthen its position and reduce the likelihood of VFA clubs poaching League players. A reduction in the poaching of League players by VFA clubs had been the main reason the VFL had entered into the 1923 agreement in the first place.

One impediment to the admission of North Melbourne was the Victorian Government’s refusal to allow the VFL to use the Arden Street Oval in 1921 because of its agreement with the VFA’s argument that this would cause it to lose its most centrally located venue. The VFL eventually received permission to use Arden Street before it agreed to admit North Melbourne to the League. As previously mentioned, North Melbourne and Footscray both had strong claims for admission to the VFL because of their success in the VFA. The other club admitted to the VFL in 1925, Hawthorn, had had little success in the VFA but it appears that its location away from the centre of the city was a crucial reason for it being admitted ahead of other applicants.

ESSENDON & FOOTSCRAY: BETWEEN THE CLUBS

When Essendon and Footscray met in 1924, the clubs had not played against each other since the Dons left the VFA after the 1896 season to be a foundation club of the VFL. Footscray had entered the Association in 1886, and of their eleven VFA games against the Dons, the ‘Scray had won one and lost the other 10, scoring 28 goals and conceding 82. On August 17, 1889, at the East Melbourne Cricket Ground the Dons booted 11 goals against the Tricolours’ one. This was the record score and margin between the clubs in the pre-VFL era. Footscray’s first and only victory over Essendon in this era occurred on July 13, 1895, when they beat the Dons by seven goals to six at Footscray’s Western Oval. Their final encounter in the VFA was also at the Western Oval on September 19, 1896, which Essendon won by nine goals to five.

DID YOU KNOW?

Essendon’s 1924 premiership was the club’s sixth in the VFL. It had previously won premierships in 1897, 1901, 1911, 1912 and 1923. By 1924 Fitzroy had won seven VFL premierships, Carlton and Collingwood five each, South Melbourne and Richmond two, and Melbourne one. Geelong and St Kilda, which had been VFL members since its formation in 1897, were yet to win a premiership, while University did not win a flag during their membership of the VFL (1908-14). Footscray’s 1924 premiership was their ninth in the VFA. After entering the VFL in 1925, together with North Melbourne and Hawthorn, they did not win their first VFL premiership until 1954.

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Editor/Designer: Trevor Ruddell

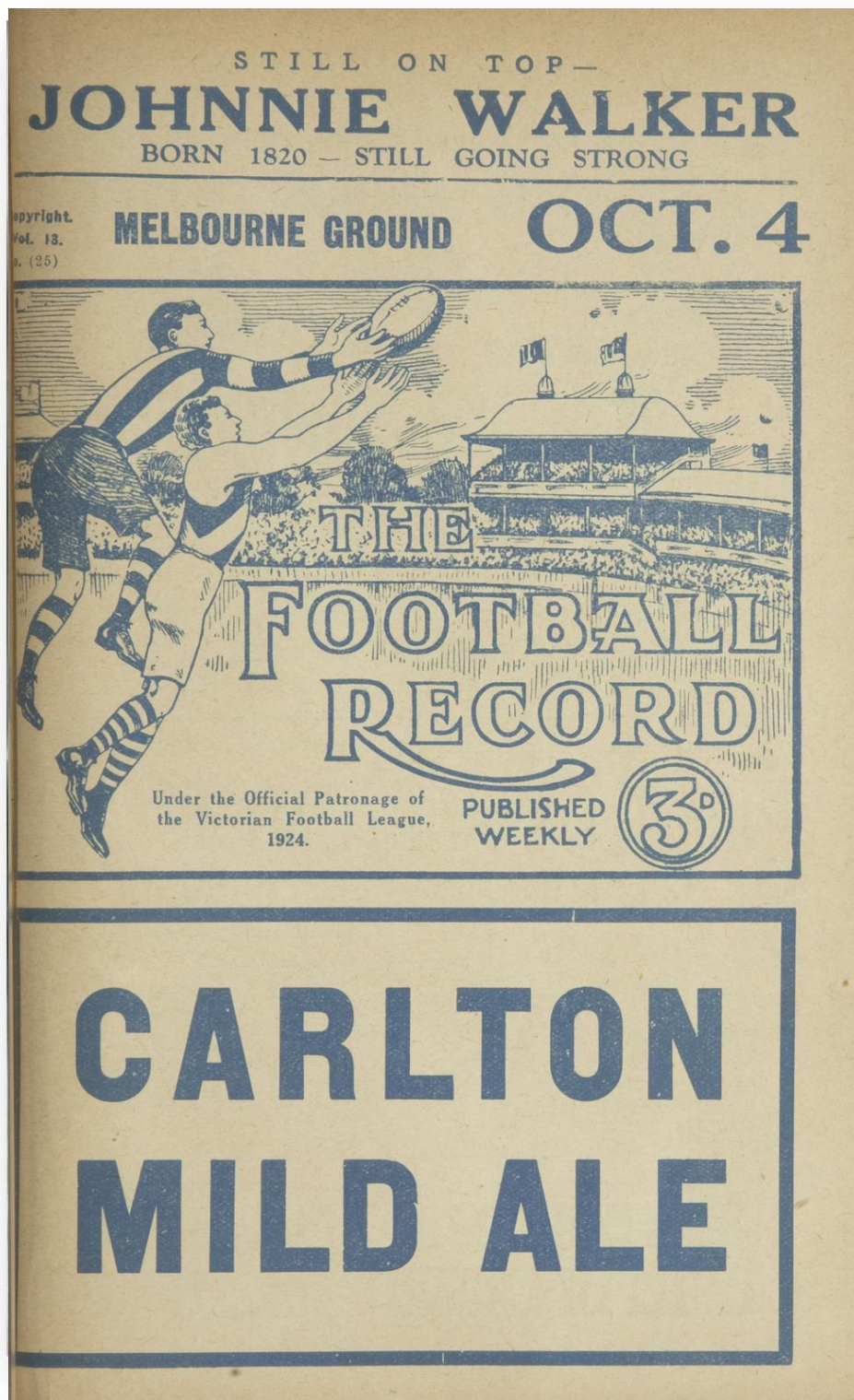
Contributor: Ian Wilkinson,

Proofreaders: David Allen, Eric Panther,
Gaye Fitzpatrick, Edward Cohen,
Elizabeth Cohen, Quentin Miller.

MCC Library

Level 3, Members Pavilion
Melbourne Cricket Ground
Yarra Park, Jolimont

Email: library@mcc.org.au
Mail to: PO Box 175,
East Melbourne, 8002



Above: *Football Record*, Vol. 13, No. 25, October 4, 1924.

Cover: Footscray's 1924 post-season team photograph (detail).

