

## CHAPTER 25

## MORE THAN 'BLOW'

*Intercolonial cricket matches 1874 and 1875. Wills edits Cricketer's Guide. Cricket Association. 'Throwing'. Intercolonial 1876, Wills ill, chosen for Victorian side, criticism from press. Dick Coulstock. Lillywhite English tour. Clarke's cricket ground at Sunbury. Chevalier Blondin, tightrope walker. Football flourishing, seeking enclosed grounds, inaccurate early history of the game. Football Association. 1877 Football Rules. Lacrosse. Boxing. Billiards. Kensington Park Racecourse. Edward Trickett world rowing champion.*

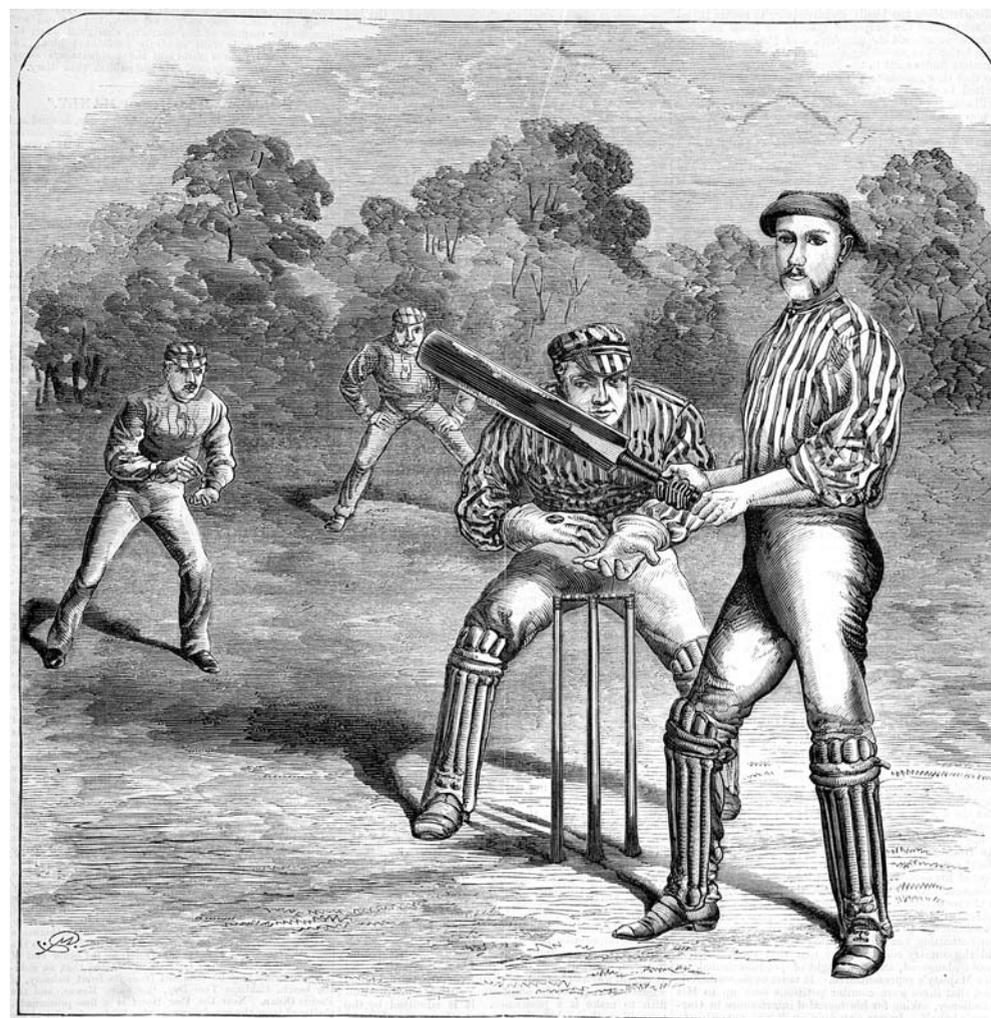
What a perfect blast of 'blow' there was; it rang in one's ears on the ground, and over the ground, and all around the ground; it streamed down to town, in cabs and omnibuses, and permeated everywhere where the people most did congregate at night.

T. Brown *Australasian* 18 April 1874

Because of the All England Eleven's visit, Victoria was reluctant so soon to have an intercolonial match in Sydney. Melbourne Cricket Club Secretary Handfield pointed out that the total loss on the last five intercolonial matches, three of which had been held in Sydney, was £341 11s.<sup>1</sup> After sackfuls of correspondence the New South Welshmen determined to come to Melbourne and hold the match on Boxing Day 1874 and have another in Sydney later in the same cricket season but in 1875.

In Melbourne the wicket was so dead and slow that Rowley filled a number of pots and tins with charcoal, which he suspended inside the iron roller, thereby heating it to such an extent that the effect on the wicket was easily apparent.<sup>2</sup> With fine batting from Charles Bannerman and three wickets in each innings from Fred Spofforth (new to intercolonial matches and a very dangerous trundler), New South Wales won by six wickets and broke a six match drought for them, Victoria having won 12 of the 16 intercolonial matches played before that time.<sup>3</sup>

Charles Bannerman received a 10 guinea cup and the South Melbourne wicket-keeper Jack Blackham a massive gold chain for their performances.<sup>4</sup> Murmurs of fluke abounded but the win was not begrudged, indeed applauded in certain circles, for New South Wales had for so long been the underdog, they had garnered much sympathy. Sober times continued; no dinners, picnics or outings for the visitors. Even the luncheon was attacked: 'instead of dubious pastry, and still more dubious 'fizz' and an hour's interval, with an impatient public outside, let cold beef, and bread and cheese and beer be the cricketer's repast when the game is going on — only half an hour and no 'speechifying' was the demand of our cricket writer 'Tom Brown'. I felt it was 'deficient in gentlemanly feeling and hospitality'.<sup>5</sup>



Intercolonial match Victoria v New South Wales 1875.  
Charles Bannerman batting with Jack Blackham behind the stumps.

Interest was therefore high to see if New South Wales could repeat their win in the intercolonial held at the Albert Ground three months later in March 1875. They could. They did — by 77 runs. Bowler Ted Evans made a devastating debut.<sup>6</sup> More young lads in New South Wales fronted up before makeshift wickets with misshapen bats than ever before and their elders took to discussing the game with an enthusiastic disregard for its finer points.

There had been little talk of bringing Wills back although it was widely conceded that the Victorian bowling was generally weak. Wills had been playing regularly in the Western District Cricket Cup with the Corio Club at Geelong, for whom he was the honorary secretary, and getting a swag of wickets, 'the tenth law [forbidding throwing] being unknown in happy Geelong' as 'Tom Brown' observed.<sup>7</sup>

claims by enclosing a certificate from his medical attendant. Whether this allayed the circulating tittle tattle is another matter.<sup>19</sup>

Although still not well enough to go with a forthcoming Victorian eleven to the match in Adelaide, he maintained he would be fit to go to Sydney and confidently said, "Thursday night I dreamt that we had just won the match on the Albert Ground, and it's not the first time my dream has come true".<sup>20</sup> Wills thought himself capable of captaining the team to Sydney. He wrote several letters earnestly appealing to be included<sup>21</sup> and harped on this with such perseverance that the match committee, seeing some merit in using his experience and will to win, finally chose him in the wistful hope that he would lead the Victorians to the, by then, much desired victory over their historical opponents.

There was considerable misgiving about this tactic. Wrote Jack Conway as 'Censor':

The very inefficient way in which the Victorians were handled in the last match [by Boyle] accounts for the presence of the veteran Wills in the team. He is considerably the worst man in the eleven. He will not be allowed to bowl by a competent umpire and he can neither bat nor field. In fact he is selected solely to be captain. Though the public incline towards Wills, yet there is a very large section of the cricketing community who say that Wills is a mistake in the eleven. However we shall see.<sup>22</sup>

Early in February a Victorian eleven lost to an Adelaide eighteen on a hot baked ground in Adelaide<sup>23</sup> and returned, shortly afterwards to be farewelled by a large crowd of cricket enthusiasts assembled at the wharf to bid bon voyage to the Victorian cricketers on their departure to Sydney. Wills maintained his luck was good enough to pull the Victorians triumphantly through the ordeal ahead.<sup>24</sup>

The return match at the Albert Ground in February 1876, the twentieth inter-colonial, attracted crowds of 8000 to 13 000 and had the New South Wales side favourites in the betting. Facing the pacy Spofforth, Victoria was all out for 37 runs in the first innings as the Sydney crowd jumped up and down, tossing their hats with glee. Wills, last in, did not face a ball and was not out for none in the first innings, and for 4 runs in the second innings.<sup>25</sup> Despite good bowling by Victoria's Frank Allan, New South Wales won easily by the large amount of 195 runs. Melburnians awaiting the telegrams posted outside the *Argus* office were staggered. Said Jack Conway in his 'Censor' column: "The result has created a profound sensation and is looked upon by the Victorian public almost in the light of a public calamity."<sup>26</sup>

The team left the New South Welshmen celebrating long and hard their fourth successive defeat of the Victorians. The Sydney press was critical of Wills's captaincy as were the Melbourne weeklies, though it was admitted on all sides that even the most consummate generalship on Wills's part could not have won the game.<sup>27</sup> But the team was not satisfied. Wills kept himself on too long when securing no wickets and the New South Wales batsmen were scoring faster off the Victorian captain than they were off Allan, Cosstick and Midwinter, the other Victorian bowlers.<sup>28</sup> 'Censor' in the *Australasian* did not mince his words:

Wills in his day all will acknowledge was the best all round player in Victoria and he held undisputed control over the cricket field for many years. He however grew old and stiff, as he now is, and ought to have sensibly allowed himself to be shelved. Wills refuses to grow old and, on every possible occasion, where he has the least encouragement he assures his friends he has 'come back to his old form' and is 'as good as ever he was in his life'. The glorious memories of the past, Victoria's palmy days, are brought to recollection and the Match Committee, despite the warnings of good judges of the game as to Wills's utter incompetency, find him a place in the team to the exclusion of dozens of better men. As was predicted, he miserably failed and showed an amount of misjudgement about on a par with that he displayed in the match against the combined thirteen. Wills has had his last show and for goodness sake let him be relegated to retirement.<sup>29</sup>

Wills was indignant at criticism of his generalship. He did his best, he maintained and "there is not a man in the colony who could have done better, if as well".

Came the reply: "No one will compliment Wills for having done his best. The colony selected him to do that. As to no man in the colony captaining the team as well, that's Wills's view of matters but certainly not the opinion of nineteen persons out of every twenty."

"The team can speak for themselves", answered Tom.

"My dear T.T.W., they have spoken, and the general opinion expressed by them is that you 'kept on a little too long'. Your penchant for 'keeping on a little too long' seems to have intensified as you grow older".

A letter the *Australasian* published pointed out: "Some men cannot keep out of print. Mr. Wills, we all know, is of the number. His best policy would have been silence, for the facts are against him."<sup>30</sup> As indeed they were: Tom had figures of 196 balls for 65 runs, 18 maidens and no wickets. He bowled 52 more balls than the most successful bowler, Frank Allan, who had figures of 144 balls for 29 runs, 18 maidens and 3 wickets.

In a letter not long after, Wills wrote, 'detraction linked with envy next appears,/ Sneering at excellence it cannot imitate,/ Though still affecting to despise', which probably says more about his attitude to his situation than anything else.<sup>31</sup>

Tommy's persistence was not a matter of acquiring mere money; it totally denied giving up his passion — the only thing in life at which he had ever really succeeded and the only thing which mattered to him. Cricket was Tommy's life. If cricket was over, what was left? He had had four games with Richmond over that 1875–1876 season. He went back to play for Corio in the summer of 1876–1877.<sup>32</sup>

But it was the final coup de grace. Another challenge and Wills had muffed again. Oh yes, it is indeed painful if you are a champion sportsman and you should retire. His cousin had managed to do it twice — once from his athletics and once from his football. Coley went with dignity, courage, and the applause of those who had watched him often and revelled in his glory. It takes a strong-willed man to look inside himself and recognise the end and walk away. If only Tom could have copied him.

But Colden, of course, had the satisfactions of work, wife and children. No doubt, he still found it extremely hard and painful. Tom had none of those compensations — and was his own worst enemy, to use the usual cliché circling the grounds. He was 41 in August 1876. What was there ahead for him now?

Moreover he was short of the 'ready' and many a professional cricketer had finished up in pecuniary difficulties. Consider the pathos of some famous professional cricketers reduced to penury. The pavilion of South Melbourne (Emerald Hill) was a mere shed not much larger than a Newfoundland dog's kennel in which old Dick Coulstock, who played in the first intercolonial match at the Melbourne cricket ground, lived as 'curator', if indeed such a term could be applied to the position he filled. I often woke him up when out for my early constitutional, 'ere the sun topped the South Yarra hill, and the first remark he usually made on emerging from his den was, "Don't the turf look well this morning?" Indeed it did look well and great credit was due to Coulstock for the manner in which he had levelled and made it.<sup>33</sup> He had a cow or two and used to sell milk to make both ends meet, for poor Dick got very little salary. I often used to chat with him. All alone, except with his big dog Sandy, poor Coulstock passed the long winter nights there.

He used to complain about a pain in his chest at times: "Not much", he said, "but a curious pain." One day he was having a ball or two and made a sudden movement back to escape being hit in the chest. The ball however did hit him and a quarter of hour from that time it was all over with poor Coulstock. I think Jack Conway was present when he died and, if I remember right, Tom Wills also.<sup>34</sup>

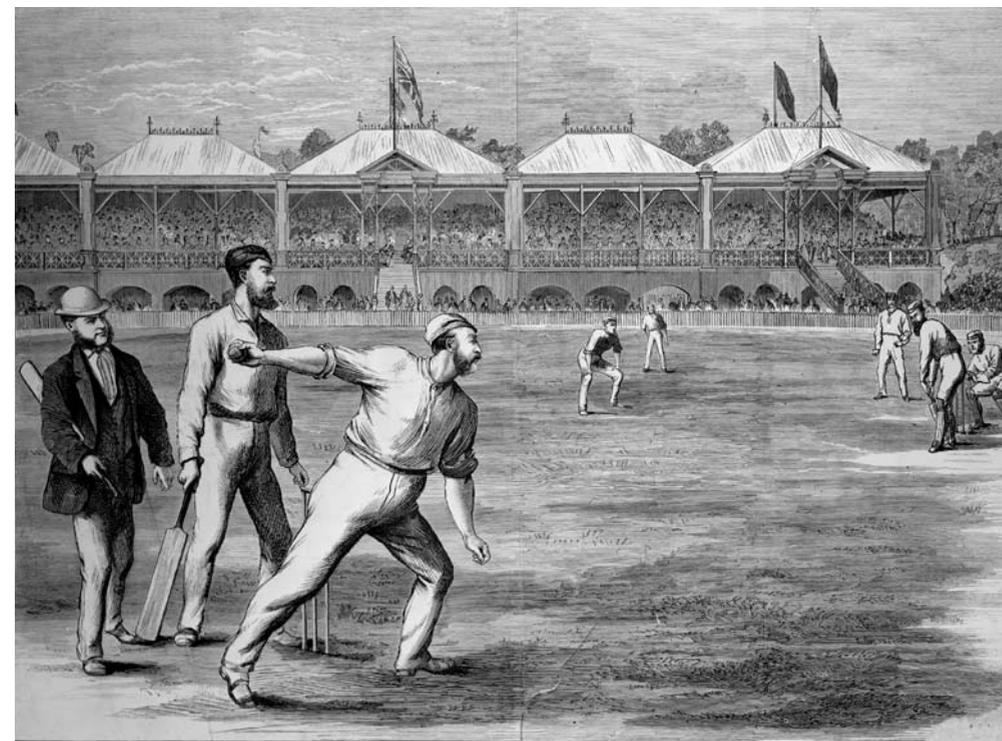
On the other hand, Sam Cosstick, the 'old hoss', who had played for us and New South Wales for years, was looking to retire. His last intercolonial was in February 1876 — his first in February 1861 in Sydney. We maintained he should be given a benefit before poverty compelled him to ask for one. Yet he is still going strong.<sup>35</sup> Under most circumstances professionals cannot make a very good living in the summer and, when winter comes, their occupation has gone.

The performance of the Melbourne Cricket Club had been poor and the annual 1875 meeting of the Club had decided to employ a professional bowler from England at the cost of £150 per annum, half that had been notoriously paid to Caffyn.<sup>36</sup> It took some time but eventually Ben Terry arrived early in 1876 from Nottinghamshire.<sup>37</sup> At the beginning of the 1877 season the Melbourne Cricket Club decided for the first time to pay its secretary and advertised the position at £250 a year. Tommy applied, claiming 'many years' devotion to Colonial Cricket<sup>38</sup> but not surprisingly, from a number of applicants, the task was given to Curtis Reid who had played for Victoria and came from a well-connected pastoralist family with a brother who was a member of the Legislative Council,<sup>39</sup> not that Tommy could not at one time have matched that background. There was no relief for him there.

The summer of 1876–1877 was memorable for the beginning of 'the finest grandstand in the world' on the M.C.C. ground. The £50 architectural prize had been won by George Browne from seven competitors and he was to supervise the work. The bluestone foundations were being laid in September.<sup>40</sup> Three wide stone staircases

would lead to the first floor where rows of seats under an iron roof would provide an excellent view of the ground for some 2000 spectators. In a way reminiscent of Bagot's cowshed, the ground floor was five steps below the surface and contained a number of rooms. The stand's most unusual feature was that the seating could be reversed so that in the winter spectators could sit in the stand and see the football played outside the cricket ground. This was, at last, the permanent grandstand for which I had devoutly wished, although being publicly guarded about the cost which was to be raised by debentures!<sup>41</sup>

The English were coming once more. James Lillywhite's 1876–1877 team contained four professionals who had visited with Grace: Lillywhite, Harry Jupp, Andrew Greenwood and James Southerton. They brought with them Tom Armitage, Tom Emmett, Allen Hill and George Ulyett from Yorkshire, Tom Selby and Alfred Shaw from Nottingham, and Edward Pooley and Henry Charlwood from Surrey and Sussex. They were welcomed briefly in Melbourne and admired the new elegant and commodious grandstand almost completed at the Melbourne cricket ground before they set off for Sydney where there was public astonishment as Spofforth and Evans for the Sydney fifteen bowled out the England eleven for 35 runs.<sup>42</sup> A good crowd cheered both sides impartially and a few staunch believers stoutly averred, 'Our men are too good for them and can play them 11 a-side.'<sup>43</sup> Two weeks later such a match was hastily arranged at the Albert Ground, played only over two days as



Lillywhite's Eleven plays Fifteen of Victoria in December 1876.  
The first grandstand proudly illustrated.

the visitors were committed to leave for New Zealand. It was drawn as New South Wales followed on Lilywhite's team's first innings total of 270, with 82 and 140 runs and four wickets to fall.

It was generally conceded that the form displayed by the English was not of the high standard expected of them and their failure was attributed in some quarters to a cause which the Englishmen would not be pleased to hear so I will leave them to guess it. But there had been too much play in a short time, as the team had gone to Ballarat, Geelong and then by sea to Sydney. Our Victorian cricketers were well aware how unfitted a man is for a day or two after landing from a trip to Sydney and that is the reason why nearly a week's prior practice in Sydney is now insisted upon before our intercolonial matches.

James Lillywhite's team of professionals was defeated on three occasions: first at Sydney, then at Melbourne, and then against Sydney a second time. In each instance it was pitted against 15 men. Naturally this led to a desire on our part to see how the colonists would fare in an even-handed contest. So a combined side match was organised to take place in Melbourne in mid March 1877 to consist of five New South Wales players and six Victorian players. Through some oversight the New South Wales Cricketing Association was not formally asked to assist in the arrangements and, as a result, the match was not favoured by authorities in Sydney who tried to prevent Sydney cricketers coming to Melbourne. Spofforth, at the eleventh hour, stated he would not go unless Murdoch was selected as wicket-keeper, urging that Murdoch was the only wicket-keeper that knew how to take him properly. Evans also could not come and the capricious Allan dropped out at the last moment.<sup>44</sup>

The combined team known as Australia made 245 and 104 (349), the English 196 and 108 (304). Australia won thanks to the brilliant batting of Charles Bannerman who retired hurt at 165 with a split finger, having hit up just over two thirds of the total score. Of additional importance was the bowling of Victorian cricketer Tom Kendall, who took 7 for 55 in the second innings. I compared Blackham's wicket-keeping to that of that great master of the gloves, Tom Lockyer.<sup>45</sup> This was later pronounced to be the inaugural test match when an Australian eleven played an English eleven. The term 'test', which I first used back to describe the games against the English eleven led by 'Surrey' Stephenson, was picked up by the English press in the 1880s and then applied retrospectively.<sup>46</sup>

We tried not to indulge in 'blowing' to show Mr. Trollope was wrong but hoped to prove the win was not a fluke. A fortnight later another match was arranged also in Melbourne. This time Spofforth and Murdoch were included and Allan was not asked to play. England had their reply as Australia, with innings of 122 and 259, lost to England whose total of 383 runs left 4 wickets to fall. It was a grand occasion with the Governor present and Terry and Cosstick as umpires.<sup>47</sup> Bannerman was presented with 90 sovereigns as recognition of the 165 not out scored in the first match, and so concluded the second test match.

A sour note was the appearance of betting at the matches that summer. Talk of 'tenners' and 'ponies' was commonplace and the hooting of some crowd members

was put down to losing bettors. In Sydney a cricketer was approached to allow the Victorian side to get sufficient runs so it would not be defeated in an innings when a large sum was at risk. Shop windows listed the cricketers with odds for the highest score. We railed against the possibility of bookmakers shouting the odds from the steps of the Melbourne Cricket Club pavilion.<sup>48</sup>

William Clarke invited some cricket sides to play cricket at his residence in Sunbury. He had established a ground of which there were good views from the balconies of the house and a natural grandstand was provided by a steep hill on one side. Clarke entertained his visitors with luncheon in a marquee. He was imitating the actions of English gentry who, when I left England, also had cricket grounds in their estates and invited other gentlemen to play in matches, providing lavish hospitality. I had been the recipient of such hospitality when invited to play at Captain Alexander's seat, the Auberies in Essex, making one of the Captain's private eleven which I did on several occasions.<sup>49</sup>

Melbourne was indeed cricket-mad, alleged Chevalier Blondin, French 'hero of Niagara' as he was known, looking down from his tightrope at his own benches and the crowd packing the East Melbourne cricket ground.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless he thrilled us with a series of three performances a week, late in 1874, weather permitting. Not only could he walk across the rope but cook an omelette on a stove, run backwards, march blindfold or chained from neck to ankles and with his feet in wicker baskets, carry furniture and pick-a-back his secretary Mr. Niaud. When he pretended to slip, everybody's heart was in their mouths. He began on a night early in November unperturbed by lightning and thunder and concluded after Christmas with some spectacular night performances in which he pushed a wheelbarrow on the wire and set off soaring rockets and whizzing catherine wheels from the barrow and the long pole he held.<sup>51</sup>

Football had now spread throughout the length and breadth of the land, 'every little country town boasting its football club, whose members pursue the sport with utmost zeal, and many of them with no small measure of success', wrote my football reporter 'Peter Pindar'.<sup>52</sup> Football indeed was booming in the country and at the beginning of the season a number of the city clubs ventured out, via the ever enlarging railway system, to play country clubs in early matches, usually inflicting an easy defeat. Football's increasing importance was recognised this year by the Commissioner of Railways who granted, following a deputation from the St. Kilda Club, the privilege of travelling at railway excursion fares for footballers bound for a football match in the country.<sup>53</sup>

At the end of 1877 in surveying the principal sports in Melbourne I averred:

the most popular of sports in this colony was undoubtedly football ... Football is often termed rough and brutal, but a fine school to develop those manly attributes characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race and, under efficient umpires, resolved to carry out our simple but excellent code of rules, there is no danger of the game degenerating into horse-play and brutality. The energy with which the game is pursued in this

in 1860 with one hundred members but unfortunately no James (JB) Thompson to publicise the rules and insist on them.<sup>66</sup> Similar rules meant a Victorian team could play a South Australian team three years later.<sup>67</sup>

Sydney's Rugby Union Waratah Club challenged Carlton to play two games, one under the rugby union code and the other under the Victorian rules, at the Albert Cricket Ground in Sydney. Each won the game of its own code. Sydney showed no signs of taking up Rules football. Rugby was their game and it had survived pressure to outlaw it for brutality. Tom Power had a theory that resistance to adopting Victorian Rules was based on interstate jealousy. 'The sooner the name is altered to the Australian Rules of Football the better', he declared.<sup>68</sup> A glib assumption, perhaps? Rugby was seen as a monotonous succession of scrimmages relieved by a short run with the ball tucked under the arm, ending with the runner's head in the pit of an opponent's stomach. There were reports from Queensland that they had deserted rugby for the 'more popular Victorian sport' according to 'Peter Pindar'.<sup>69</sup>

It was about this time that it was realised that football was here to stay and recollections of the early beginnings of the game were published. Although not much time had elapsed since we played those games in the Richmond Paddock and set out the rules in a back room of the Parade Hotel, there was already confusion about two matters — the date and the men who framed those first rules. Tommy Wills was claiming it was 1857. A paper that came out, called *The Footballer*, claimed the autumn of 1858, demonstrably wrong — it was the autumn of 1859 — and to add insult to injury praised Coley Harrison as a founding father and excluded Tom Smith, much to the latter's chagrin and protest. I managed to set the editor of *The Footballer*, Thomas Power, right on that, having been one of the four on that significant day of 17 May 1859 myself.<sup>70</sup>

We published the Rules of the English Football Association in the *Australasian* and our reporter 'Fair Play', after speaking to a number of players, wrote: 'no one would like to change our concise rules for playing the game for the apparently cumbersome code in use by the English Association ... Rules which do not allow the picking up of the ball in the hand will find little or no favour here. It is considered one of the features, if not the leading characteristic, of our way of playing.'<sup>71</sup>

'Tom Jones' claimed in the *Footballer* that the game was designed by its founders to be so played that Rugby, Eton and Harrow men from the fatherland would have no difficulty in adopting its rules, and though these have undergone considerable modifications, the fundamental principles remain unaffected to any material extent. He explained:

for simplicity of styles — the rules being so plain 'that a man though a fool may not err therein' - absence of unnecessary roughness and the high qualifications of fleetness, strength and endurance of body combined with evenness of temper, and suavity of disposition, necessary to ensure much proficiency in a player, will compare favourably with any game in the known world, while the weal with which it is pursued by our athletes, and the countenance given it by the public far exceeds that of any other place

in the British dominions, including the 'tight little island' itself, as many as 10 000 people witnessing the matches between Carlton and Melbourne, which occur four times in the season which lasts from 24 May to 30 September, and from 3000 to 5000 may be seen at any senior match near the metropolis.<sup>72</sup>

It was not only the *Footballer* that enthused but the *Australasian Sketcher*: 'It is very satisfactory to find that a pastime of this kind has so perfectly acclimatised in our midst, for as long as our youths are addicted to football there is very little fear of their losing any of the physique or pluck their fathers bought with them from the 'sea-girt isle.'<sup>73</sup>

If not fear, there was definite apprehension. That was the time when Redmond Barry sought information on the physical development of colonial youth. A circular was sent to all clubs requesting details of age, height, weight, measurements of arms, chest and so forth of eleven players from each club in order to institute a comparison with young men born to corresponding latitudes on the continent of America. The editorial of the *Australasian*, (not my sporting leader), maintained that 'if the race in its transplantation to Australian soil retains undiminished the vigour and fire and stamina of the strong old stock of which it is an offshoot, it may overcome and outlive any unfavourable condition that it may encounter, or that its own vices or follies may surround it with'. It was impossible to overrate the urgent importance of the investigation, the editor stressed.<sup>74</sup>

The *Argus* correspondent 'Vagabond' was impressed by the crowd who came to watch football. It was, he wrote, 'a truly democratic crowd. Ex-cabinet ministers and their families, members of Parliament, professional and tradesmen, free selectors and squatters, clerks, shopmen, bagmen, mechanics, larrikins, betting men, publicans, barmaids (very strongly represented), working-girls, and half the world, all were there.'<sup>75</sup>

Such large crowds required tighter supervision and regulation of the game in the interests of both players and spectators. 'Peter Pindar' supported the idea of a football association<sup>76</sup> and four weeks later such an association had its first meeting on 1 June 1877 attended by men from the football clubs of Albert Park, Ballarat, Barwon, Carlton, Castlemaine, Geelong, Hotham, Melbourne, Inglewood, St. Kilda, Rochester, and Beechworth. The Association was to be composed of one delegate, later two delegates, from each of the senior clubs, to have control of all intercolonial matches, to adjudicate upon and supervise all matters connected with the game, and to be the final court of appeal in any dispute that might arise. President was William Clarke, secretary H.H. Budd from East Melbourne, treasurer Tom Power from Carlton and the *Footballer* editor. Coley Harrison was a vice-president and Robert Robertson, president of Carlton, another. Its first duty was a revision of the rules and this it did faithfully and well, dealing not only with slinging, throwing the ball in when out of bounds, dangerous boots and kicking, encroachment of spectators, but giving umpires power to award free kicks, throw the ball up and encourage players to 'play on' if that was preferable to stopping the play.<sup>77</sup>

One who watched Melbourne versus Carlton, was my old athletics committee colleague, and Harrison's rival, Lambton Mount. He remembered as a child in Canada seeing the Red Indian tribes playing lacrosse and felt that it was a superior game to football. He set about initiating it in Victoria, importing 40 lacrosse sticks, acquiring the rules and holding a meeting of men interested in playing.<sup>78</sup> Three years later there were 120 players in four clubs — South Melbourne, Fitzroy, Carlton and the original Club of Melbourne. There was an association of two delegates from each club, His Excellency the Governor was Patron and the rules had been printed and distributed. We thought the game important enough to have a correspondent whose nom de plume was 'Centre'.<sup>79</sup> Lambton often acted as judge or a handicapper at the athletics where I was still starting the pedestrian races. Verney Cameron, nephew of my old gold-digging confrere and Victorian cricketer selector also gave us a hand.<sup>80</sup>

The feeling against violent sport extended to boxing, now seen as rough and vulgar, and we reviewed a public boxing match at the Princess Theatre with some distaste.<sup>81</sup> Jem Mace, celebrated English boxer arrived in 1877 and boxed a number of the locals mainly in Sydney but befriended Larry Foley the acknowledged bare-knuckle champion in Melbourne. Foley's best known bout was a fight against Melbourne's older Abe Hicken. Such fighting was illegal but it was planned to take place across the Murray in New South Wales and, hardly being Melbourne's best kept secret, the Victorian authorities went to great lengths to prevent the fight from happening. It did happen. Local fishermen made a fortune as they ferried the spectators across the river in leaky canoes to a makeshift ring of stakes lashed with rope amongst the gum trees. The fight went for an hour and twenty minutes and consisted of 16 rounds until Hicken was no longer able to stand. Sam Waldock was the referee! Picked up later in Sydney and taken to Court, the fighters and their seconds, James Mace and John Thompson, were discharged when it could not be proved that money was involved and that it was a *prize* fight! Foley became a successful boxing instructor in a school he and Mace put together until Mace went to New Zealand in 1882.<sup>82</sup>

John Roberts Jun., the English Billiard champion, came to Melbourne and gave exhibition matches at the Athenaeum where the seats were arranged in tiers so we all had a good view of the table. He then toured a number of country towns and went overland to Sydney. He astonished with his skill and fancy range of shots as did Professor Pierre Carme, the great French billiardist who arrived soon after and performed at the Theatre Royal Café before an admiring throng. The two games were different and I attempted to get them to play each other. Monsieur Carme agreed to play Roberts at billiards if Roberts would play him at the French game of carom, with Carme to give Roberts 400 points out of 1000 and Roberts to give Carme the usual handicap of 600 points out of 1000. The stakes were £100, and £100 for the largest break, stakes that I held. Carme lost at the English game, Roberts winning by 99 points but, while we could get hold of an English table, it was more difficult to get hold of a French one and the French game did not come off.<sup>83</sup> The locally-made Alcock tables continued to meet with much appreciation.<sup>84</sup>

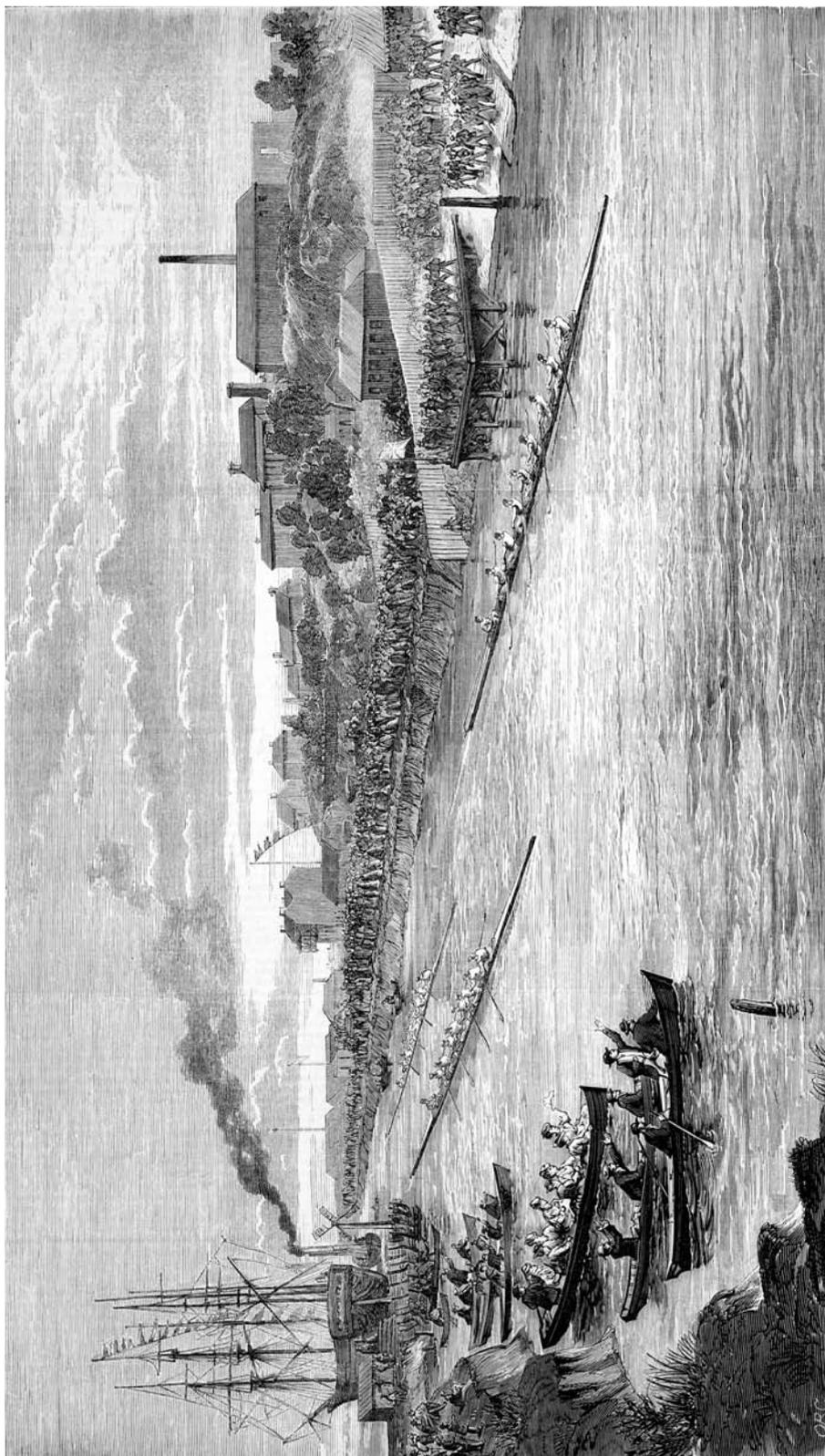
Some small competition to Flemington began late in 1874 when William Samuel Cox opened his privately-owned, gate-money Kensington Park course. Existing for a certain class of horses and a certain class of patrons, Kensington Park was a charming racecourse of the miniature kind, and cleanly and carefully run with card-sharpers promptly evicted from the course.<sup>85</sup> When a jockey alleged lead weights had been removed from his horse's saddlecloth, Cox initiated an investigation and his stewards, among them the well known racing men George Watson and Herbert Power, disqualified the owner for ever and I praised the jockey in an editorial.<sup>86</sup> The new course was within a stone's throw of Kensington station and return tickets cost one shilling. Mr. Cox's particular patrons would never desert him despite the shadow of Flemington.<sup>87</sup>

Ten years after Victoria had put forward a claim to an intercolonial four-oared aquatic match and only after they had been defeated, three times in Sydney and once in Hobart, and a difference in the definition of who constituted an amateur was temporarily resolved, did Victorian rowers finally become victorious in Melbourne waters. That was in 1873, and they met again in Sydney in 1874 with a pigeon fancier at Miller's Point having the first bird home to tell all that Sydney were once more ahead. At least the boats were Victorian with Sydney's built by Yarra man, Walter Greenland, and the Victorian by Victorian stalwart Jem Edwards.<sup>88</sup>

Rowers were back on the Saltwater River for the regatta of 1874 after the wattles and willows along the river from the Princes Bridge by the Botanic Gardens became too dense for the comfort of the spectators. Eight-oared boats first raced when Warehousemen, Civil Service and the Ballarat City Club competed on the Saltwater in 1875. It was a close finish, Warehousemen beginning at 40 strokes a minute but overtaken eventually by Civil Service. Ballarat, probably not so knowledgeable about the Yarra conditions, was stuck briefly in the mud of a bank but made a quick recovery to come third at less than a length than Warehousemen.

We thought the intercolonial could be developed like the Oxford Cambridge tussles in the old country, strengthening youthful development and building muscle. It was our rowing man, Byrne, who advocated the introduction of the intercolonial eight-oared race which first came off in 1878 on the Lower Yarra passing malodorous bone mills and several soap and fellmongering establishments to the Metropolitan Gasworks, about four miles in all. The steamers with spectators were soon left behind as was the umpires' boat stuck on a mud flat, but fortunately Victoria won by a clear length to great cheers.<sup>89</sup>

Earlier there was quite a stir when a four-oared crew of ladies took to the water in dark blue jackets with white trimmed sailor collars and sailor hats. The boat carried a blue flag with the word Nautilus worked in white letters — that was the name of the Club. The life boat of the Victorian Humane Society was new — launched in time-honoured fashion with champagne at Princes Bridge by the Governor and a *recherché* luncheon. Its broad beam enabled two men to be on one side of the boat without capsizing it.<sup>90</sup> The lifeboat was made of kauri and blackwood but not all of

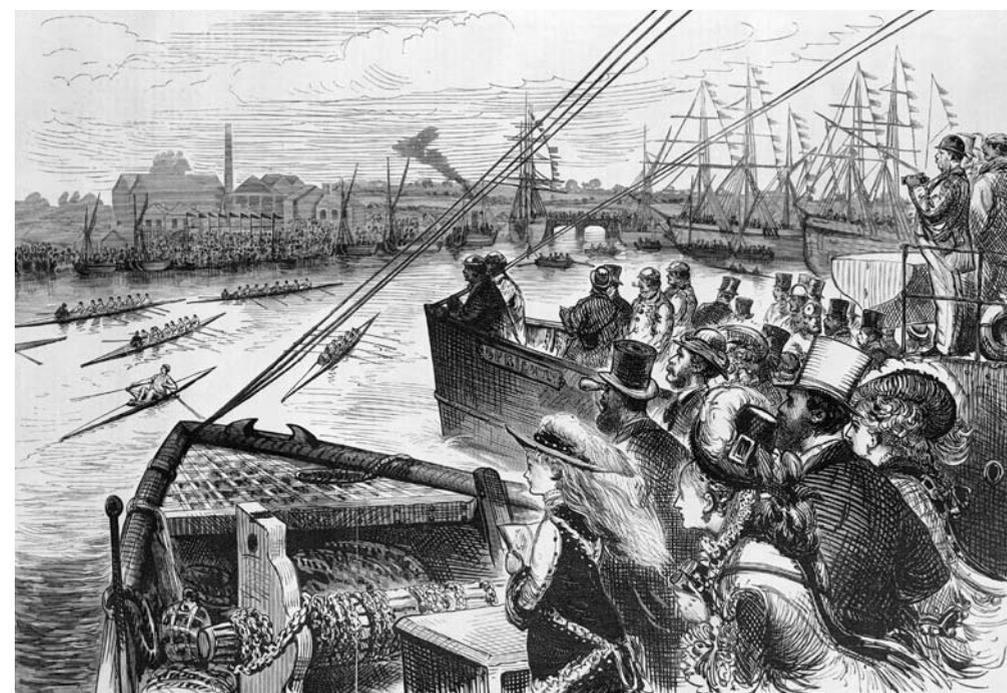


The first eight-oared boarace in Melbourne

the boats were locally made; rowing clubs also looked to England — an eight oared outrigger was imported for the Melbourne Club in 1876, for instance.<sup>91</sup>

There was no doubt that Sydney had wonderful rowing conditions compared to the Yarra which was increasingly filthy and polluted and about which there was little to do except send a petition to parliament. A general *Australasian* editorial described the river as 'little better than a gully of fluid mud periodically agitated by the tide, and maintained in a state of viscous fluidity by the churning it receives from the screws and paddle-wheels of the steamers.'<sup>92</sup> Old stumps which were dangerous were hauled out of the river and defiant ones dynamited.<sup>93</sup> Even Albert Park Lagoon which collected sewerage from Emerald Hill had an offensive stink. It tended to dry up in the summer and the new Albert Park Rowing and Yacht Clubs had to wait for winter rains to race every Saturday.<sup>94</sup>

About rowing there was none of that colonial 'blowing' a celebrated novelist has talked about. Well, at least not until James Punch and Edward Trickett from Sydney came quietly to this city, booked their places on the mail steamer, and arrived in England on the day of the university boat race, 8 April 1876, having challenged James Sadler, the champion sculler of England, for the championship of the world. Jem Punch, a professional waterman as a young man, had taken on the English sculler, a much older Ben Oxlade, in Melbourne some thirteen years ago and won.<sup>95</sup> Punch was there to support Trickett and they took up their quarters at a hotel on the bank of the Thames, trained with ex-champion Henry Kelley who introduced Ned Trickett to the sliding seat, and then raced Sadler over the four miles from Putney to Mortlake



The view from the umpire's boat

on 27 June. The telegraph sent us the result — Trickett, easily, by four lengths.<sup>96</sup> The tall twenty-four year old's win was hailed everywhere in Australia and created intense excitement in Sydney. At long last we had not only beaten the English but had a world champion. No matter that he came from New South Wales.

The success of Edward Trickett and the cricketers against Lillywhite's team encouraged both sports and a prologue delivered at a concert fundraising for the University Rowing Club enthused:

Shall we degenerate from that goodly stock  
From which our sires have sprung, and be the mock  
Of senile antipodean censors? No,  
We'll prove we can at least do more than 'blow'  
For see where England's veteran oarsman quails  
Before the stalwart son of New South Wales  
And mark her chosen Eleven, across the main  
With shorn laurels speeding home again.<sup>97</sup>

## CHAPTER 26

## TURF TOUTS

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*John Stanley James ('Vagabond'). Robert Bagot. My experience in English racing. The Derby. English sporting journals, Hawley case. Editorials. Adam Lindsay Gordon. Touting. Tipping. William Yuille ('Peeping Tom' and 'Playboy'). Edward S. Chapman ('Orange Blossom' and 'Augur'). Neeld Bond ('Beacon' and 'Falcon'). William Philip Simons ('Observer' and 'Ragpicker'). Turf Register. Victorian Stud Book. Australasian Stud Book.*

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There he sat, as I thought, expounding the law and the prophets, until, on drawing a little nearer, I found he was only expatiating on the merits of a brown horse.

W. Irving Bracebridge Hall

Hugh George, manager of the *Argus*, was bailed up one night in 1876 at the office by an audacious but down-at-heel young man not long arrived from America who asked for some journalistic work. He said his name was Julian Thomas.<sup>1</sup> Hugh gave him a sovereign and a chance to show what he could do. The reports of the 'Vagabond' on the underworld of Melbourne soon had readers intrigued, yet when I drove him down to Flemington in October, not half a dozen people knew him either by name or by sight. We strolled down — it was very early — and took up our position on the top of a fence at the lower end of the ground among the more respectable portion of the company, the 'Vag' smoking and I telling him lots of things about racing, in fact, posting him up a bit.

Early though we were, there was a goodly collection of people at the 'scraping sheds' watching their equine favourites as they came in and out from exercising. Scattered about the ground watching the performances on the different tracks of sand, tan and cinder were groups of touts. On the turf there is true democracy. Amongst all this crowd of touts, there were trainers of Victoria and New South Wales, shopkeepers and clerks of sporting tendencies, sporting publicans who make a modest book, or bet on commission, and a few gentlemen. There were outlawed blacklegs, men who subsist by getting up sham 'sweeps' or laying against 'dead 'uns' amongst their number, some who have broken all laws human and divine, and should be hounded from the society of even ordinary vicious men.

Strings of blanketed horses were gently walking around, others stripped quietly cantering, others still racing at full pace. Touts were very particular in watching the gallops. Stopwatches in hand, reporters and trainers carefully timed the moment of starting and finishing the round of the track, criticising the performance as the horses passed, afterwards comparing notes as to the time.