

FOOTBALL FLASHBACK:

WHEN TITANS BATTLED IN SLUSH AND HAIL

By HUGH BUGGY

Richmond won the premiership in 1921 after two Homeric contests against a really powerful Carlton side on a ground that was almost a swamp.

THOSE who played in the and grand final of 1921, those who watched those two struggles, needed the stoicism the endurance of an Indian. They were thrashed on the first noon by chunks of ice in a hailstorm that flung up white mocks of hailstones on the turf. They were lashed by a blast that might have blown off bergs and polar bears. They drenched on the second afternoon a dense wall of rain that for a muffled the players in a grey fog sent a yellow flood surging about ankles.

Yet through it all the weights of the Tigers and the crashed, jolted, and splashed way through two of the toughest final struggles seen on the Melb

ground. Wet day football tests the stamina of a team, and on those appalling days two superbly fit teams did not flinch for a moment. Neither of them revealed one weakling or anyone who looked like a weakling. They were all vital he-men who battled on through slush, hail, and murk with a grim intensity that kept the wet and bedraggled crowds roaring from bounce to bell. Those two crowds of 43,000 and 64,000 saw two virile, hard-hitting hunts for a sodden ball heavy as a suet pudding.

By 1921 Richmond had built up an immense reputation for dashing,

an immense reputation for dashing, vigorous, and diehard football, which struck awe into most opposing teams. And in that season a revitalised Carlton side emerged as their strongest rival. That new, strengthened Carlton team, which had weight, punch,

and pace, checked the Tigers in the first match of the season at Punt rd. by 8-14 to 7-11. Carlton played great football in 1921, with Bert Boromeo, Horrie Clover, Maurie Beasy, Paddy O'Brien, and Alcc Duncan at the top of their form.

After having snatched an exciting one-point win over Collingwood by 7-11 to 6-16, the Tigers got properly into their stride. They mastered most sides until the Blues thrashed them soundly at Princes Park in the return game by 14-15 to 6-12. That victory made Carlton look a moral certainty for the 1921 premiership.

Yet the Tigers improved steadily and romped away with the first semi-final against Geelong by 16-19 to 6-18. Carlton, mainly by a sounder first half, downed the Magpies in the second semi-final by 9-11 to 7-10.

AS the Blues finished at the top of the list, Richmond were faced with the task of beating them twice before they could place their second pennant above the Jungle. It was no mean order against the class football that Carlton were playing. That preliminary final was a desperate

That preliminary final was a desperate tearing, rushing battle. Bumps flew about freely in a hectic encounter in which no quarter was given or asked. The Tigers, while taking the crash of weight and returning it, were the more accurate and dashing side in the first half, and ran to a lead of 5-5 to 2-10.

Then at half-time came the deluge—and what a deluge! Who will ever forget that hailstorm that burst over the Melbourne ground like a rattle of machine-gun fire. It bombarded the ground with the utmost ferocity for 20 minutes. Hailstones rose in icy drifts all over the ground. When those drifts began to melt it looked as if half of the Yan Yean reservoir had been let loose across the ploughed sward.

Out they went for the third quarter with the water swishing round their boot tops. Had they been on the field when it was flayed by hail and icicles, the final match would have been forgotten, and they would have been forced to gallop for shelter. Nobody without a tin helmet, oilskins, and sea boots could have continued playing football through the avalanche.

The Blues adapted themselves to the flood and ice more quickly than Richmond, and by a great effort fought to a three-point lead, 7-14 to 8-5, at the last change. It was a terrific neck and neck contest in the slush in the last quarter, with the well-matched rucks battling in pools and clouds of spray. Richmond got



two early goals and by a rugged, desperate defence, hung on to win by eight points, 10-7 to 7-17.

IN the grand final, a week later, the going was terribly heavy. Carlton developed their long-kicking game to perfection in the first half. Only an almost impenetrable Tiger defence deprived them of a much longer half-time lead than 3-4, to 1-3.

Then, soon after they started the third quarter, a terrific downpour drenched the ground. It soaked the outer crowd, which in those days had little shelter. It helped to smother Carlton and disrupt its long game. It enabled some of the Richmond heavy brigade to come into their own, and a stern battle of brawn swept back and forth. They were neck and neck at the last change, with the ground once more bespangled with pools. It became a question of the survival of the fittest, and called for a knowledge of seamanship rather than football.

In the last quarter Richmond battled to 5-6 to Carlton's 4-8, with eight minutes to play. Blackened with mud, the two teams became locked in a desperate struggle. The Blues charged in, first from one flank



Blues charged in, first from one flank and then from the other, in as terrific and sustained an onslaught as any bunch of defenders ever had to weather.

Max Hislop, Jimmy Smith, and Vic Thorpe rolled back wave after wave of attackers to cling to that precious four points' lead. The Tigers had their backs hard against the wall.

There was one minute to go and a premiership at stake. A sodden ball flew through a mist of rain to the Carlton forwards. That great mark Alec Duncan, then playing at centre half-forward, flew for it at handy distance.

Then came Max Hislop, a resolute Tiger defender, and great player, literally hurling himself in the path of the ball. He leapt in front of Duncan, spoiled the mark, and raced the ball away as the bell rang with the rain pelting down.

And so the second premiership pennant flew over "The Jungle."