MCC Library Fact Sheet
March 17, 2024

AFL 2024 Round 1
Melbourne v Western Bulldogs

Seventy Years Ago - The 1954 Season

Melbourne and Footscray played off in the 1954 grand final with the Bulldogs winning by 51 points in front of a crowd of 80,897 at the MCG. This was Footscray's first VFL premiership since joining the competition in 1925. The only other meeting between the teams during the 1954 season was in Round 10 at the Western Oval. Judging by Peter Banfield's report on this game in the *Argus*, it would appear that a rematch between the two teams in the grand final did not seem likely. Banfield wrote:

> Footscray disappointed even its own players and officials by an unimpressive win over Melbourne at Footscray on Saturday. In a scrambling, fumbling game, mistakes were more common than brilliance. Melbourne could have won, but wasted too many opportunities. Footscray kicked badly – at one stage it scored six behinds straight – and showed a general lack of cohesion. Saving factors were its strong defence and ruck. Melbourne players who roamed wide of their positions, also helped. In the second half Melbourne had as much of the play as Footscray, but its attacks often broke down on the half-forward or forward lines. It showed determination and speed, but could not score. Poor passing to forwards was a major weakness of both teams. Footscray half-back flanker Jack Gallagher was best man on the ground.

The final scores were Footscray 10.13 (73) to Melbourne 8.9 (57). Footscray dominated the second quarter of the game, kicking 5.10 to Melbourne's 0.2 but, after leading by 42 points at half-time, the Bulldogs kicked only three goals to Melbourne's seven in the second half.

Footscray's win kept them on top of the VFL ladder on percentage from Collingwood and North Melbourne, each having recorded seven wins. Melbourne, which had won five games, was in seventh position. In the remaining eight rounds of the home and away season, Footscray recorded four wins and a draw (with North Melbourne) to finish second on the ladder behind Geelong. After a loss to Richmond in Round 10, leaving them on the same number of wins as Melbourne, the Cats won all eight of their remaining games to top the ladder. Reigning premiers Collingwood faded after Round 11, recording only two wins in their last seven games to finish the season in seventh position. Like Footscray, North Melbourne won four games and drew one after Round 10 to finish on equal points with the Bulldogs, but one place behind them on the ladder due to an inferior percentage.

Melbourne, which had finished in 11th position in 1953, showed much better form in 1954 but their young side struggled to maintain consistency and when they lost to Fitzroy by 11 points in Round 15, they were still in seventh place on the ladder. Nevertheless, a good win over Richmond, which eventually finished fifth, in Round 16, and wins over St Kilda in Round 17 and South Melbourne in Round 18, secured fourth place on the ladder for the Demons.

Melbourne really struck form in the finals, defeating North by 30 points in the first semi final and Geelong by 17 points in the preliminary final. The Bulldogs had beaten the Cats by 23 points in the second semi final and they proved to be the far better side in the grand final, taking control after half time to win comfortably. While Bulldogs supporters had to wait until 2016 for their next premiership, the 1954 grand final was the first of seven consecutive grand final appearances by the Demons, which included premierships in 1955, 1956, 1957, 1959 and 1960.

Over To You – Ron Barassi Jnr & Ted Whitten Snr

1. In which year did Ron Barassi Jnr make his senior debut for Melbourne?
2. In which year did Barassi become Melbourne captain?
3. How many Melbourne premiership teams did Barassi play in?
4. Against which team did Barassi play his last game for Melbourne?
5. In which year did Ted Whitten Snr make his debut for Footscray?
6. How many games (a then VFL record) did Whitten play for the Bulldogs in his League career?
7. In which year did Whitten become captain and coach of Footscray?
8. Which team defeated Footscray in the 1961 VFL grand final?

This Round in History – Round 1 on the MCG

The MCG has witnessed some big wins in Round 1. The biggest was Geelong's 127-point victory over Melbourne in 1996. This bettered Melbourne's 105-point win over South Melbourne in 1971. The Cats' score of 27.21 (183) in 1996 is also the best Round 1 score on the MCG. The best score in one quarter was by Essendon who kicked 11.3 (69) during the second quarter against Melbourne in 1935. Drawn games have figured prominently in Round 1 over the years. However, only two have taken place on the MCG, when Melbourne drew with Sydney 11.18 (84) apiece on March 27, 2011, and Carlton drew with Richmond 8.10 (58) apiece on March 16, 2023. The highest tally of goals kicked in Round 1 on the MCG was 12 by Essendon's Ted Freyer against Melbourne in 1935. The top attendance for a Round 1 game at the MCG is 90,151 for the Carlton-Richmond game in 2018.

Statistics for Melbourne v Western Bulldogs

Melbourne v Footscray/Western Bulldogs by venue

	Won By Melbourne	Won By Bulldogs	Drawn
Carrara	0	1	0
Docklands	9	11	0
MCG	48	29	0
Perth Stadium	1	0	0
Princes Park	0	5	0
Punt Road	2	2	0
Waverley Park	4	1	0
Western Oval	28	31	1
	92	80	1

Highest Score

Melbourne	23.21 (159)	Rd 9	1984	Wav
Footscray	26.13 (169)	Rd 15	1985	WO

Lowest Score

Melbourne	3.9 (27)	Rd 8	1932	WO
Footscray	3.6 (24)	Rd 11	1963	WO

Greatest Winning Margin

Melbourne	80 points	Rd 12	1943	PR
Footscray	120 points	Rd 15	1985	WO

Last Time They Met – Round 1, 2023, MCG

	Melbourne	Bulldogs
Quarter time	3.3	2.4
Half time	9.4	5.9
Three-quarter time	13.8	8.10
Full time	17.13 (115)	9.11 (65)

Most Goals in a Match (10 goals or more)

12	Norm Smith	Melb	Rd 17	1941	MCG
12	Simon Beasley	Foots	Rd 15	1985	WO
11	Fred Fanning	Melb	Rd 12	1943	PR
10	Fred Fanning	Melb	Rd 18	1947	WO
10	Ron Grove	Foots	Rd 5	1946	PR

Played For Both – Garry Baker

A ruckman, who was originally from Meeniyan (a small town in south Gippsland, Victoria, between Leongatha and Foster), Baker made his League debut for Footscray in the first of week of the 1972 season, after appearing in their reserves the previous year. He did not play another senior game that year and managed only another 13 games in 1973 before being swapped by the Bulldogs in a deal which saw him and two other Footscray players move to Melbourne, and Greg Parke to Footscray. Baker had an immediate impact at Melbourne, and was named Best First Year Player in 1974. He quickly became his side's number one ruckman but suffered a hamstring injury mid-season 1976 and did not play another game for the year. Melbourne had recruited Craig McKellar from Richmond as its number one ruckman but after McKellar retired, Baker came into his own and won Melbourne's Best and Fairest Award in 1978. He suffered a knee injury in Round 1, 1979, which caused him to miss the next six matches. Instead of an operation, he worked to strengthen his knee with exercise, and returned to play 16 matches for the season and another 16 in 1980 before he hurt the knee again. He played his last game for the Demons in Round 13, 1981, before suffering further knee problems. He remained on Melbourne's list until March 1983 when he was delisted after tearing his groin in a practice game. Melbourne's match committee decided that at 30, Baker was too old to regain full fitness but the Sydney Swans took a chance on him as an experienced big man. He played six games for the Swans in 1983, bringing his total number of League games to 147 (14 for Footscray; 127 for Melbourne and 6 for Sydney). Baker finished his career in the VFA with stints as coach at Mordialloc in 1985 and Moorabbin in 1986. He then moved to Hobart to operate a hotel and played two games for Sandy Bay before retiring.

Over To You Answers:
Q1 1953. **Q2** 1960. **Q3** Six (1955, 1956, 1957, 1959, 1960 and 1964). **Q4** Collingwood in the 1964 VFL grand final. **Q5** 1951. **Q6** 321 games. **Q7** 1957. **Q8** Hawthorn.