

## Post war soccer in Geelong by Roy Hay

### The transformation of Soccer

Between the end of the war and 1960 the face of soccer in Australia was completely transformed. The game switched from being overwhelmingly Anglo to being dominated by European migrants. Senior soccer was being played in Geelong in 1950.<sup>1</sup> At least four clubs or teams are known to have existed: Geelong United, Geelong Celtic, International Harvester and Industrial Service Engineers Pty Ltd.<sup>2</sup> International Harvester and Geelong Celtic played in the Third Division North of the Metropolitan League, finishing 6th and 5th respectively.<sup>3</sup> Geelong Celtic was based at the Geelong Teachers' College and its team was very Anglo-Australian, judging by the players' names.<sup>4</sup> Celtic only lasted for a season and a bit, since the teachers concerned were all sent their separate ways, and their replacements the next year were largely Australians who were not interested in soccer.<sup>5</sup> International Harvester also had a high proportion of Anglos at this stage, though Frank Hegyesi, one of the first Croatian migrants, played for the team soon after arrival and was known as Frank Harvester for many years.<sup>6</sup> Geelong United was referred to as a newly formed team in July 1950. It played Geelong Celtic in a friendly on 29 July 1950 going down by three goals to nil, but not being disgraced according to the report.<sup>7</sup>

At this point we need to tell two separate stories. One is what happened on the soccer field to the various teams which came into being from the early 1950s onwards. The second story is what soccer meant to that generation of migrants to Geelong as they tried to come to terms with the curious society in which they found themselves.

### The story of the teams

In 1951, Geelong United was in Division Four, while International Harvester remained in the Third Division and indeed won promotion to Division Two that year.<sup>8</sup> Both teams remained heavily Anglo in 1951 judging by team lists.<sup>9</sup> By the early part of July, International Harvester had only suffered two defeats, both at the hands of Coburg.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> So far I have been unable to trace any newspaper references to soccer in Geelong in 1949.

<sup>2</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 2 September 1950, refers to matches between Geelong United and a combined Geelong Celtic and International Harvester team and a friendly between the latter and Industrial Service Engineers.

<sup>3</sup> *The Age*, 3 July, 10 and 13 July 1950, *VASfA Handbook*, 1951, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 1 May 1950. The team which beat Woodlands 5-0 on Saturday, 29 April was: Johnson, Dyer, Cooke, Rawlings, Thornely, Stratford, Smith, Sullivan, Atherton, McGarry, Oxley. The referee that day was a Mr Sandford. Other players to take part that year included Baxter, Crosbie, Day and Glenn. *Geelong Advertiser*, 10 July 1950.

<sup>5</sup> Information from Ron Day, former Deputy Librarian of Deakin University who played in that team,

<sup>6</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 3 July 1950. Among the team which beat Coburg on 1 July 1950 were T McNaught, Morrison, Edbrooke, Burns, Grace, Vaisny and Frew.

<sup>7</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 31 July 1950. "A little unsteadiness and lack of precision in front of goal," was its downfall.

<sup>8</sup> *The Age*, 25 June, 1951, 5 May, 1952.

<sup>9</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 13 July 1951. Geelong United named E Frew, M Vyner, G Herbert, H Howarth, L Thomas (captain), D Frew, M Taylor, H Mealy, D King, W Edwards, K Hata, and reserves T Gateley and J Lameretz to play Heidelberg in the League Cup on 14 July 1951, while International Harvester called on: M McNaught, J Vaesy, J Cheney, J Jefferson, F Boon, H Rice, A Morrison, W Dorris, J Busay, M

International Harvester was the only team from Geelong mentioned in the Victorian Amateur Soccer Football Association Handbook for Season 1952. In 1951 it played at Victoria Street, but according to the Handbook it later moved to Cresco Fertilisers Cricket Ground close to Nelson Park Greyhound Racing Track.<sup>11</sup> Its colours were red and white shirts and white shorts.<sup>12</sup> It did not appear for the 1953 season. A split within the club occurred over who was eligible to play for the Harvester team. A later VASFA Handbook for 1957 indicates that the Geelong club was founded in 1952.<sup>13</sup>

In 1953, a team simply named Geelong was playing in the Dockerty Cup and in the Second Division of the Victorian League.<sup>14</sup> There it remained for a couple of seasons and on Saturday, 27 August 1955, it recorded a major upset by defeating league leader Slavia by an incredible score of thirteen goals to four, thus "giving the side a wonderful chance to escape the drop to third grade."<sup>15</sup> A new team called Shell started playing in the Third Division Reserves at the start of 1953. It won its first matches by huge scores and was promoted to the Fourth Division for the second half of the season, being involved in 9 matches, winning five.<sup>16</sup>

It was between the 1954 and 1955 seasons that Geelong became the IAMA club (Italian Australian Migrants Association) Club secretary in 1954 was Mr. A. A. Smith and the club had a very cosmopolitan team.<sup>17</sup> By 1955, the composition had changed, with Italians prominent throughout the side.<sup>18</sup> Though it played under the name Geelong in the Metropolitan competition, it was recognised as an Italian club, and the usual stereotypes applied.<sup>19</sup> The Secretary for 1955 originally nominated in the VASFA Handbook was Jaan Saro, but he was replaced by G Sitar during the year.<sup>20</sup> The club colours changed from red and white to blue shirts, white shorts and blue socks, the Italian national colours. Geelong finished in sixth place in a ten-team Second Division.<sup>21</sup>

Hamilton, J McNaught, C Edbrooke, T Savo, J Barclay and J Mason for the game against Williamstown in the Divisional Cup.

<sup>10</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 10 July 1951.

<sup>11</sup> Billy Dorris, senior, insists the ground was Victoria Street.

<sup>12</sup> *Victorian Amateur Soccer Football Association Handbook*, Season 1952, in the possession of the author. The Secretary of the Club was Mr. A Morrison of Anderson Street, Torquay.

<sup>13</sup> *VASFA Handbook* 1957, pp. 12-13.

<sup>14</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 3 July, 1953, 31 July, 1953, where it is noted that Geelong played against the Division Two leaders, South Yarra. *VASA Handbook* 1953, p. 15. The Secretary was D. McArthur, 82 Melbourne Road.

<sup>15</sup> *The Age*, 29 August, 1955. In the light of recent events this result must be regarded with some suspicion.

<sup>16</sup> *Victorian Amateur Soccer Football Association Handbook*, 1953, pp. 18, 38-41, *VASFA Handbook*, 1954, p. 49.

<sup>17</sup> The team for the opening match was C. Kuhne, H. Tenfert, J. Savo, J. Campbell, Z. Zucchelli, A. Beer, G. Scheitner, G. Gaschk, H. Bishop, R. Dorris, C. Pergoletti. *Geelong Advertiser*, 2 April, 1954.

<sup>18</sup> In April, 1955 the team was Massese, E. Valesi, Gubbiani, Campbell, Zucchelli, Beer, Scheitner, Bahl, Frittoli, Urizio, Pergoletti. All players were requested to be ready five minutes before the game commenced at 2.45 pm! *Geelong Advertiser*, 22 April, 1955.

<sup>19</sup> Alex Barr of *The Age* commented, "Geelong's main weakness - a common failing among Italians - is inability to capitalise when in scoring positions." *The Age*, 13 April, 1957.

<sup>20</sup> *VASFA Handbook* 1955, p 14. Handwritten amendment in the copy held in the VSF.

<sup>21</sup> *VASFA Handbook* 1956, p. 49.

In 1956 Geelong was second top of the Second Division, seven points behind Wilhelmina and four points clear of Hellenic, and well ahead of Yallourn from the Latrobe Valley.<sup>22</sup> Club colours for the 1957 season changed to blue and black vertical stripes, the colours of Internazionale Milan, and the Secretary was now Raoul Babadoro of 280 Bellarine Street and the home ground Corio Oval.<sup>23</sup> In 1957 also Joe Radojevic took over from Tony Durakovic of Footscray as Secretary of Croatia, then playing at Yarra Park and brought the Croatian club to Geelong.<sup>24</sup>

So in 1957, Geelong was playing in a ten-team Victorian First Division with Juventus, Hakoah, JUST, Wilhelmina and Polonia. Geelong's keeper, Penzo, attracted the attention of the soccer correspondent of *The Age*, Alex Barr, who thought he was 'as good as any keeper who had played in this state'.<sup>25</sup> Penzo was selected to play for Victoria, one of a select band of Geelong players who have represented the state or Australia. Geelong also had several former Juventus players in its line-up including Gennari, Sabidussi and Sergio Bassi. Geelong continued in the State League (which was formed in 1958) until 1959, but was relegated at the end of that year.<sup>26</sup> In 1960 it was playing in Victorian Division One South.<sup>27</sup>

In 1956 a local league competition (Geelong Amateur Soccer Association) was started and by 1958 there were eight teams, British, Corio (German), Olympia 1 and 2 (Dutch), DSG (Dutch Society of Geelong), Ukrania, Scottish and Toldi (Hungarian). A representative team was selected with a view to playing a match against Ballarat.<sup>28</sup>

Two other Geelong clubs achieved success in the 1950s. Corio and Croatia Geelong had reached the Victorian First Division North in 1959.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile Croatia Melbourne had been amalgamated with Croatia Geelong under the dynamic leadership of Joe Radojevic. In 1959, Croatia finished on top of the First Division North, was presented with League pennant, which still hangs on the wall in the Melbourne Knights clubrooms. After the end of the season a protest by Preston against Lions resulted in Preston getting promotion to the State League instead of Croatia. Preston then contacted Croatia Geelong inviting an amalgamation, which eventually went ahead after much debate, but Preston was relegated at the end of the 1960 season. Croatia Geelong continued in Division One North, which is was to win in 1962, after having moved its playing centre to the Maribyrnong Speedway in Melbourne. This whole complex story and much more is told in my paper on forty years of Croatian soccer in Victoria.

Geelong and Corio continued to play in the Southern and Northern sections of the Victorian First Division in 1960 and 1961, while Geelong Scottish and Bell Park were

<sup>22</sup> *VASFA Handbook 1957*, p. 69; *Argus*, 7 May, 1956, 14 May, 1956. Yallourn had been active in the Victorian league from at least 1947, *Argus*, 9 June, 1947. In 1952 it was in the First Division, *The Age*, 5 May, 1952.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, pp. 8, 12, including handwritten amendments in the copy held in the VSF.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p. 24.

<sup>25</sup> *The Age*, 1 June, 1957. Penzo did play for Victoria against one or more of the touring sides of the period.

<sup>26</sup> Geelong was beaten three-nil by Box Hill on 19 September, 1959, the last occasion on which a Geelong team played at State level in outdoor soccer, until Geelong City and North Geelong reached the National Youth League (Southern Division) in 1989. *The Age*, 21 September, 1959.

<sup>27</sup> *The Age*, 8 June, 1959, 27 June, 1960.

<sup>28</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 6 May, 1957, 1 July, 1958, 7 July, 1958, and information from Billy Dorris, Senior.

<sup>29</sup> *The Age*, 8 June, 1959.

in Division Three.<sup>30</sup> The local competition in 1960 included Nimrod, Macedonia, Zagreb, D S G and Croatia in addition to Scottish, Geelong, Olympia, British, and Corio.<sup>31</sup>

1963 was a black year for the Geelong clubs as they were banished from Metropolitan competition by the newly formed Victorian Soccer Federation as part of its policy of encouraging soccer in regional areas of the state, much to the chagrin of Geelong and Bell Park which had finished as runner-up in its Division and had looked to promotion.<sup>32</sup> Geelong finished bottom of Metropolitan First Division South and Corio bottom of Division One North, so neither had a strong case against relegation of some kind.<sup>33</sup> The Ballarat and Geelong Districts Soccer Association began with seven Geelong teams - Scottish, Geelong, Corio, Wilhelmina, Bell Park, Corio B and Geelong B, and four from the Ballarat area, Ballarat, Wendouree, Ararat and Kosciusko.<sup>34</sup> In 1965, Polonia, Indesco and Fortuna 65, from Ballarat, plus Bell Park Reserves joined the league, with Wilhelmina, Corio B and Geelong B dropping out.<sup>35</sup> Bell Park was the undefeated champion in 1964 and 1965.

In 1966, there were two Divisions. A First Division of eleven clubs, and a second of nine and Geelong won the league from Bell Park.<sup>36</sup> The next year the First Division had grown to twelve teams with the addition of Geelong West, Geelong City and Mount Clear, Scottish had become Hamlyn Rangers, and Ararat and Fortuna had dropped out. Fortuna had gone completely, while Ararat dropped to the twelve team Second Division, which now included Belmont.<sup>37</sup> In 1967 to revive a Croatian presence at senior level, North Geelong was formed around Christmas, and began to play in the BGDSA in 1968. Corio began its push for better things and left the BGDSA in 1968 to join the Metropolitan League in Division Four, where it finished fourth in its first season. The local league now had only nine teams in the First Division - Hamlyn Rangers, Indesco, Geelong, Bell Park, Geelong City, Geelong West, Mount Clear, Redan and Wendouree.<sup>38</sup> The last three of these were Ballarat teams. In 1969, Corio remained in Division Four, and all the Geelong teams which applied to fill the vacancy in this league were rejected in favour of Eltham.<sup>39</sup> North Geelong and Langi Kal Kal joined the BGDSA.<sup>40</sup>

Corio played in Division Four in 1970 and was promoted to Division Three in 1971.<sup>41</sup> Corio's progress continued and by 1972, Corio, Hamlyn Rangers, Bell Park, North Geelong (briefly) and Geelong were back in Metropolitan competition, with Corio in Division Two under coach, Billy Muir and the others in the Provisional League.<sup>42</sup> The local league now included Bell Park, Langi Kal Kal, Hamlyn Rangers, Corio, Brintons A and B, Geelong City A and B, Belmont, Geelong West, Geelong and Redan.<sup>43</sup> North Geelong was active with first and reserve teams in the BGDSA in 1973, while Bell Park

<sup>30</sup> *The Age*, 6 June, 1960, 5 June, 1961, *Geelong Advertiser*, 4 July, 1962, 11 July, 1962, *Soccer Week*, 3, 1975?

<sup>31</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 20 April, 1960.

<sup>32</sup> *Soccer News*, 3, 1975?

<sup>33</sup> *Sporting Globe*, 4 September 1963, p. 16.

<sup>34</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 7 April, 1964.

<sup>35</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 8 July, 1965?

<sup>36</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 24 August, 1966. Bell Park was definitely runner-up, and Geelong was on the same points with two games to play, while Park had one.

<sup>37</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 12 July, 1967.

<sup>38</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 3 July 1968.

<sup>39</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 12 April, 1969.

<sup>40</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 19 April, 1969.

<sup>41</sup> *The Age*, 1 June, 1970, 14 June, 1971.

<sup>42</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 12 July, 1972.

<sup>43</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 20 July, 1972.

had risen to Division Four Metropolitan and Corio had slipped back into the third. In 1973 North Geelong was back in the local league and won the BGDSA First Division.<sup>44</sup> North Geelong had been expelled from the Provisional League in 1972 following a home match against Werribee. It was readmitted to the BGDSA in 1973. This was the same year that Croatia was dismissed from the VSF for crowd trouble at Olympic Park. Hamlyn Rangers led the Provisional League in mid-season, with Geelong in 5th place.<sup>45</sup>

1974 was a good year for Bell Park which led Division Four in June, and it clawed its way into Division Three, while Corio languished at the foot of Division Four and Geelong and Rangers soldiered on in the Provisional League.<sup>46</sup> June, 1975 saw Bell Park on top of the Third Division, while Corio lost its first seven matches in Division Four. Geelong and Rangers pursued leaders Morwell Falcons in the Provisional League.<sup>47</sup> Geelong was building up a good side with a view to joining the Metropolitan League. In 1976, Bell Park was champion of Division Three, Geelong won the Provisional League and North Geelong won the Western Victoria Soccer Association League.<sup>48</sup> Geelong however was passed over in favour of Morwell Falcons, which had been the Provisional League champion the previous year. At that time there was no automatic promotion between the Provisional Leagues and the Victorian Metropolitan Leagues. Bell Park played in Division Two in 1977, with Corio still hanging on in the fourth.<sup>49</sup>

North reached Provisional League Division Three in 1979, while Corio and Bell Park continued to struggle in Divisions Four and Two of the Metropolitan competitions.<sup>50</sup> Geelong and Hamlyn Rangers were still battling to get out of the Provisional League between 1979 and 1981, when both were finally promoted to Metropolitan Division Four. North Geelong played in Provisional League Division Two in 1980 and 1981 and jumped into Metropolitan Division Four with the other two Geelong clubs in 1982. Meanwhile Bell Park went down to Division Three at the end of 1980, but won promotion the following year to Division One, where it was to hang on by the skin of its teeth until the end of 1984. It slid quickly into Division Three at the end of the 1985 season and it was not till 1989 that it was able to regain its impetus. In that season it won the Division Three title and went on to win Division Two in 1990, though its victory was coloured by a bribery scandal involving a member of the club and the Geelong goalkeeper, Sean Howe.<sup>51</sup>

Hamlyn Rangers won Metropolitan Division Four in 1983 with North Geelong in second place and Geelong fourth. Strangely, North Geelong went up to Division Two, while Rangers went on to win the third Division in 1984 and then joining North at the higher level. Corio slipped back into Division Four at the end of 1983 and remained there until the amalgamation with Geelong United in 1986-7. Geelong United had worked its way up from the WWSA through the Provisional leagues to come second in Division One in 1986. In what was widely seen as an Italian take-over of the largely German Corio, the new combined team hosted the Geelong Advertiser Cup in 1987, but failed to reach the final and showed little improvement in the league, still being in Division Three until the end of 1993, having narrowly missed promotion in 1989.

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<sup>44</sup> The North team included Steve Horvat, Miro Zanic, J Pribudic, Joe Radojevic (Mary Didulica's brother) Jakov Juraga, J Alesovic, B Jovanov, Blago Colak, M Dzin, V Favro, Drago Perinac, Ivan Roso (coach?). Photo in North Geelong clubhouse.

<sup>45</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 23 June, 1973, 7 July, 1973, 14 July, 1973.

<sup>46</sup> *The Age*, 3 June, 1974, *Geelong Advertiser*, 28 July, 1975.

<sup>47</sup> *The Age*, 2 June, 1975.

<sup>48</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 13 August, 1976.

<sup>49</sup> *The Age*, 6 June, 1977.

<sup>50</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 27 August, 1979.

<sup>51</sup> See separate chapter on this incident.

West Geelong, the club of the Macedonian community, also left the WVSA, in 1979 or 1980 and joined the District League. It was promoted to the Provisional League, Division Three in 1982 and in 1984 it jumped into Division One, where it finished eighth. The next season it changed its name to East Geelong but after another mid-table finish in 1985, it only just avoided relegation in 1986 and went down to the second division in 1988. Reorganisation brought it up again for 1989, but after flirting with relegation that year it went back down again at the end of 1990, having lost its ground at Howard Glover Reserve after installing floodlights there. Sharing with Hamlyn Rangers at Myers Reserve it hosted the Geelong Advertiser Cup in 1991.<sup>52</sup> At the end of 1993 it merged with Geelong.

Mention of Geelong Advertiser Cup brings me to two significant events in 1981. First there was the first playing of the Geelong Advertiser Cup, which is now established as the premier non-Metropolitan soccer competition in Victoria. Played as pre-season tournament and up till this year has always involved only Geelong clubs. This year two Werribee clubs participated with mixed results. Bell Park hosted and won the first competition. It was the inspiration of Bill Walsh, a former Irish internationalist and the Advertiser's soccer writer at the time. The Advertiser saw this as a way of tapping into the new potential readership in the northern suburbs with their interest in soccer. The concept has worked for both the paper and the clubs.

The second significant event in 1981 was the formation of the Association of Geelong Soccer Clubs, with Councillor Gerry Smith as President. Its aims were to create a National Soccer League team in Geelong, gain a permanent home for soccer which could be developed as an attractive stadium and promote the game by improving coaching at senior and junior levels. Steve Stacey, who was also writing for the Advertiser was a livewire development officer and the initiative had the support of all the Geelong clubs, with the exception of Bell Park, which for a variety of reasons preferred to try to reach success on its own. This was to be an unfortunate, but perhaps typical pattern in Geelong, with the strongest local club always believing that it could achieve more independently than in a co-operative exercise with the weaker brethren.

Geelong went up to the Metropolitan Division Four at the start of 1982 where it remained for two seasons, then was placed in Division Three for 1984. It went on to win Division Three in 1988 and consolidated its position in the Second Division the following year, narrowly failing to be promoted and suffering when the Jack Reilly league reorganisation plans fell through.

Brintons, founded by Brian Pugh and drawing on the carpet factory for support and players, progressed steadily through the Amateur ranks, winning Division Two in 1985 in the midst of a spell in which it was promoted in six successive seasons from 1984 to 1989. Northern Suburbs, the successor to the Hungarian clubs Toldi (and Indesco?) seemed to be on the way to emulating that when it went from the WVSA to the Amateur Leagues, reaching Division One in 1985, but thereafter the momentum slackened and after coming second in 1987 it dropped back into the WVSA in 1989, where it went through two seasons minus one game undefeated in the league.

The late 1980s saw North Geelong win Division Two and then Division One of the State League in 1991. Promoted to the Premier League in 1992, it won the

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<sup>52</sup> The money it was given by Geelong Council for the improvement of what was Crown land was put in Pyramid Building Society which failed in 1990. East bought a number of players in 1990, including some of its previous Macedonian players and it had four coaches during the year. Duncan Thomson was sacked after a second successive loss, but the team only won a couple more games and was relegated under Branko Jankulovski.

championship at its first attempt under coach Branko Culina, while star player Bogdan Bonk, was awarded the Diabetes Australia Gold Medal, the soccer equivalent of the Brownlow. Bell Park followed North into the First Division in 1989, while a combined youth team under the name of Geelong City reached the National Youth League, Southern Division, where it was joined for one season by North Geelong. Several Geelong players have been selected for State and National honours in recent years including Steve Horvat, junior, Kris Trajanovski, the Cervinski brothers, David and Adrian, Josip Skoko, Charles Fitzpatrick and Richard O'Sullivan. It is fair to say that the greatest concentration of young talent there has ever been in Geelong soccer exists today, what is lacking is a local vehicle in which they could display their abilities. Attempts to form a single representative team on a regular basis, foreshadowed by the Association of Geelong Soccer Clubs set up with Councillor Gerry Smith as President in 1981, have proved fruitless to date. Everyone outside Geelong can see no reason why this City should not be represented by a single team at the highest level, only those who are involved with soccer locally are beset by the difficulties.

### **What it all meant to the migrant generations**

Before the war and until the early 1950s the immigrants involved were primarily Anglo-Celtic (If this term can still be used) as names of players and teams makes clear. In Geelong, the change in the composition of the dominant immigrant groups comes with great speed between 1954 and 1956. In these two years, perhaps less, the balance of numbers switches very rapidly from the traditional British groups to newcomers from south and east Europe - Italians, Croatians, Hungarians - and to the Dutch. The indicators are various. Between 1954 and 1955 the Geelong Soccer Club is taken over by the Italian community and even renamed IAMA, the Italian Australian Migrants Association. Billy Dorris, Norman Haigh and others instituted the World Cup in 1955, which allowed ethnic groups to enter teams in a knock-out competition in the local area for the first time.<sup>53</sup> Holland, Italy, Hungary, Scotland, Croatia, Germany, England, Macedonia, and Ukraine took part.<sup>54</sup> Confusingly another competition the New World Cup was begun by the newspaper *Die Nieuwe Wereld* in which club teams representing the different groups took part.<sup>55</sup> The latter tournament was won by Geelong playing as IAMA in 1956. The Western Districts Association was formed with seven clubs in 1955, reflecting the broadening of the local interest beyond the clubs which were competing in the Melbourne-based competition.<sup>56</sup> In 1956 soccer disappeared from the sports pages of the *Geelong Advertiser* and reappeared in the New Australian column, with reports on IAMA and the Dutch clubs like Olympia and the DSG (Dutch Society of Geelong).

The reasons for the change are interesting and quite complex. First there is the increase in the number of immigrants from these parts of Europe in the years following the Second World War. This is connected intimately with the demand for labour by existing employers like Ford and International Harvester and by new firms like the Hume Pipe Company and Shell, whose major refinery project in Corio began in 1953.<sup>57</sup> The communities had to grow to a certain size before organised sport could begin. According to one report, there were only eight Croatian families and six single Croatian

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Billy Dorris, Senior, January 1992, tape recording in possession of the author.

<sup>54</sup> There was a Greek team also, which did not last long. Interview with Joe Radojevic, 8 July 1991, tape recording in possession of the author. See also *Geelong Advertiser*, 15 July and 10 October 1955.

<sup>55</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 20 and 26 September, 4 and 11 October 1956.

<sup>56</sup> *Sporting Globe*, 25 May 1955.

<sup>57</sup> W R Brownhill, *The History of Geelong and Corio Bay*, with postscript, *Geelong Advertiser*, 1990, p. 702.

men in Geelong in 1952.<sup>58</sup> A Croatian began to name the families who were here when she arrived in 1954. She says the first Croatians arrived in Geelong in 1949.<sup>59</sup>

Immigrants' needs for a roof over their heads and employment, probably took precedence over soccer for most people, though some new arrivals used the game as an introduction to the local community and the facilities it offered.<sup>60</sup> One Scot claims that on his first day in Geelong he went down to the International Harvesters ground to watch a few players training and was invited to come along for the game on the Saturday. When only ten turned up he was straight into the team. He broke his collarbone in the match and was cared for by the club until he was able to fend for himself.<sup>61</sup> A Dutchman told me that his leg was swollen to twice its normal size within a week of arriving in Australia as a result of his first soccer match.<sup>62</sup> A Hungarian arrived in Melbourne on a Wednesday with only a few words of English but made his way to Box Hill by public transport on Saturday to see his first match and very quickly became involved in soccer administration.<sup>63</sup> Another immigrant recounts that when he arrived from Austria he went looking for a German-speaking team and on being told there was none joined Croatia. By chance, the first game was against Corio and he found himself understanding his opponents fluently, while he could not converse with his team mates. He scored the winning goal in that game for Croatia. Needless to say at the first opportunity he moved to Corio and was still involved with the club until recently.<sup>64</sup> An inspirational Croatian made a practice of meeting boats arriving in Geelong and Melbourne in the company of a local Slovenian priest and selecting Croatians who could play soccer to join his team.<sup>65</sup> In all he brought over 350 players to Geelong, whom he billeted with local families and relatives. Many turned out not to be very good soccer players, but he brought them nevertheless. This story was confirmed for me recently by Franc Bot, senior, who was a star of the Croatia team in the 1960s. He remembers being approached to play soccer before he left the boat. In an earlier generation the father of Liliás Burke, William MacGowan, was signed up to play with Fords in Geelong as soon as his feet touched Australian soil in Melbourne in 1926.

Soccer clubs or teams may have preceded formal community organisations for at least some migrant groups.<sup>66</sup> Ian Wynd in his excellent history of the Shire of Corio suggests that the Ukrainians were the first group to set up a national organisation in the Northern Suburbs in 1956, by which time soccer clubs for Ukrainians, Croatians, Macedonians, Italians, Greeks and Hungarians had already come into existence, and some had already folded.<sup>67</sup> The Geelong Advertiser reported in September 1963, the

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Joe Radojevic.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Martin and Regina Groher, 13 August 1992, tape recording in the possession of the author.

<sup>60</sup> 'Most (migrant soccer star players) have their fares paid by their supporters here, and are found jobs with a future', *Soccer News*, 19 August 1961, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Billy Dorris, Senior, January 1992, tape recording in possession of the author.

<sup>62</sup> Information at Hume Reserve, Saturday 27 June 1992.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Andy Kun, 10 June 1993, tape recording in possession of the author.

<sup>64</sup> Reconfirmed by Fred Noggler at Hume Reserve, 22 August 1992.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Joe Radojevic, 8 July 1991, tape recording in possession of the author.

<sup>66</sup> There were only 60-70 Macedonian families in Geelong when the second Macedonian club, West Geelong, was set up in 1965 and no other community organisations existed according to Rade Trajanovski. Notes on a conversation at Geelong Soccer Club, 6 January 1994. An earlier Macedonian club was founded in 1956.

<sup>67</sup> W R Brownhill, *op. cit.*, p. 702; Geelong Hellenic Association founded, *Geelong Advertiser*, 11 July 1955; Hellenic Orthodox Community of Geelong constituted Saturday, 14 October 1955, *Geelong Advertiser*, 17 October 1955.



soccer clubs were "assisting integration of players and supporters who brought the round ball from many countries. At least 300 players and many more supporters follow the sport in Geelong. Soccer has become a great factor in integration of migrants. On the field Poles meet Hungarians. Descriptions and commentaries on TV and radio and in newspapers offer an incentive to the sports-minded migrant to learn English."<sup>68</sup>

In some cases soccer clubs were to provide integrating facilities when political concerns threatened to divide immigrant communities.<sup>69</sup> This was not always the case, and the Dutch in Geelong had two separate soccer organisations - Olympia and the Dutch Society of Geelong - reflecting existing differences, probably religious, which could not be reconciled through soccer.<sup>70</sup>

While a couple of bricks or jackets and virtually any round ball would suffice to get a scratch soccer game under way, organised games required pitches, markings, goalposts, playing equipment, referees and later some rudimentary changing facilities.<sup>71</sup> The open spaces around Separation Street in Bell Park saw several hundred people from the various communities playing soccer and practising on Sundays.<sup>72</sup> Pitches were vital, and here the local authorities, particularly the Shire of Corio, where the bulk of the immigrants settled, had an important role. The Shire's immediate post-war concerns were housing and employment, but by 1956 it was in a position to look at the recreational needs of its new citizens. Local businessmen became Shire Councillors and needed little persuasion to provide the basic facilities for soccer.<sup>73</sup> Hamlyn Park was developed by the Shire and the Geelong Scottish club out of waste ground and scrub as a multi-sport facility with soccer as the first activity. Similarly, the Shire provided two pitches at the site of Norlane Waterworld, two at Stead Park and two at Separation Street. These supplemented and later replaced the works pitches at International Harvester and the Federal Woollen Mills.

At a deeper, psychological level soccer met a need for many migrants. It was a game with which they were familiar from early youth, unlike Australian Rules which caused great amusement to some immigrants. One Croatian (who arrived in Australia under an assumed name, having been fingered, he says, by a Serbian immigration official as a member of the Ustashe when he applied under his own name) recalls nearly being beaten up by a female Collingwood supporter for laughing at what went on when he attended his first VFL game.<sup>74</sup> Pre-eminently English sports like cricket and tennis were equally outside the perceptions of most new migrants, whereas soccer was in the

<sup>68</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 16 September 1963.

<sup>69</sup> There is a pioneering discussion of the institutions of some of the immigrant communities in Melbourne in Rachel Unikoski, *Communal Endeavours: Migrant Organisations in Melbourne*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1978. This gives weight to the importance of soccer clubs in these communities.

<sup>70</sup> At least according to Joe Radojevic and Billy Dorris.

<sup>71</sup> Initially players changed in cars or in the open, according to both Billy Dorris and Joe Radojevic. Chris van Beek got a female friend to write to the *Geelong Advertiser* complaining about naked men changing within sight of young female hockey players at Stead Park. Van Beek had been trying for some time to persuade the Shire to build changing rooms for Geelong Soccer Club. Within a few weeks of the letter appearing in the press, a new tin shed with showers was completed.

<sup>72</sup> *Geelong Advertiser*, 11 July 1955, in the Northern Suburbs column.

<sup>73</sup> Norman Haigh, who was deeply involved with Geelong soccer was a Shire Councillor in Corio from 1953 to 1960, Ian Wynd, *op. cit.*, p. 273; He was a member of the Corio Club. He died on Saturday, 12 May 1973, *Geelong Advertiser*, 19 May 1973.

<sup>74</sup> This man was also the father of one of the best full forwards to play in Geelong, for Geelong West in the VFA, and he later became a devotee of the game.

blood. Migrants were good at soccer. It was a sport and an activity at which they could excel and gain recognition, within their communities and later outside them even if to a limited extent.

There is no doubt that for the young adult male arriving in Australia a cultural transformation had to take place if he was to survive in this new society. Having lived on his wits and the support of refugee organisations to get to Australia, he then had to begin to function in a society with very different sets of norms and goals and organisations. Soccer, about which he knew a great deal, unlike the language and customs of the new country, was often the means by which that transformation was effected. The road was rocky and collisions occurred, notably in the 1950s and 1960s within the game, when many matches were abandoned or truncated because of violence, usually taking the form of attacks on referees. If you could not get the result you wanted within the rules, then attack the person who was supposed to be applying the rules. Or you might carry the competition into a battle with opposing supporters. The test case for this in extreme form was the experience of the Croatian teams up to and after 1972.<sup>75</sup>

For survival in a new world, in an alien environment, which often had not been chosen - several immigrants sought to go to Canada or the United States of America and only finished in Australia as a last resort<sup>76</sup> - where the language and customs were almost incomprehensible, where discrimination and worse was rife, and qualifications and skills were systematically devalued, networks of support were vital. Soccer and soccer clubs provided some of these networks which extended through all areas of social life. Even today contacts within the soccer world provide a whole range of services and mutual support systems. There is no pretence that soccer is the only such focus (church, cultural and folkloric groups, political organisations and other sporting groups, like bocce and handball/volleyball, play a similar role) in immigrant communities in Geelong, or even that it is the most important at all times and in all places, but it is highly significant nevertheless. In the late fifties and early sixties there was a dearth of community organisations for the migrants and soccer clubs often filled the breach.

Soccer provided an entry into local and national politics for both indigenous minorities and migrants.<sup>77</sup> At the national level, Charles Perkins owed some of his early public profile to his soccer career.<sup>78</sup> At the local level in Geelong, a substantial number of councillors in the Shire of Corio have been closely involved with soccer, including Norman Haigh, a Scottish businessman who, along with Billy Dorris, instituted the inter-ethnic competition which led to the New World Cup in 1956, Michael Parks, Polish co-founder of Bell Park, Gerry Smith, a Liverpoolian who was instrumental in the setting up of the Geelong Association of Soccer Clubs in 1981-2 and held office in

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<sup>75</sup> See below pp. 32-34.

<sup>76</sup> Youngsters in Europe saw Australia as a land of snakes, venomous spiders and kangaroos, America as the land of fast cars and consumer goods, Martin Groher, interview 13 August 1992, tape recording in the possession of the author. Among less voluntary migrants, one internee jumped over the side of the *Dunera* when it was announced after ten days at sea that the destination was to be Australia not Canada. When they arrived in Hay, one camp specialised in handball, the other in soccer. K G Loewald, 'A *Dunera* internee at Hay, 1940-41, *Historical Studies*, 17, 1969, pp. 513 and 518.

<sup>77</sup> The DLP recruited central European refugees from Communist totalitarianism in their campaign against the Labour Party. Janet McCalman, *Struggletown*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1984, p. 284.

<sup>78</sup> *Soccer News* (South Australia), Vol 6 No 40, 1 October 1960, Front page; *Soccer News Programme*, Budapest v Croatia, 28 September 1960. Perkins was captain of Croatia when it won the Adelaide Advertiser Cup in 1960.

Geelong Soccer Club in 1993, Mario Grgic and Vinko Ljubanovic, who are Croatians involved with North Geelong.

But when politics is mentioned in connection with soccer it is usually with the implication that soccer is being used as a vehicle for introducing matters relating to the internal affairs of the migrant's homeland into Australian life, which is better off without such eruptions.<sup>79</sup> There is no doubt that soccer has been used in this way. At times when some other avenues of political expression were closed off soccer clubs have provided symbols of national identity for migrant groups.

Soccer acted as a vehicle for political activities particularly for those communities whose homeland was perceived as threatened. One could almost argue that there is a direct relationship between the importance of soccer to a community in Australia and the depth of the "national problem" in the former homeland. Hence Croatia, Macedonia, Hungary, Ukraine, Greece and Italy were enormously influential in Australian soccer as their European compatriots fought to establish or maintain independence or democratic systems. The Dutch and English, after an initial post-war flourish, declined quickly in relative importance. Australian society and political systems often provided little legitimate outlet for migrants' political concerns and hence soccer often formed a substitute system.

In a pre-television age soccer clubs were the centre of entertainment networks. The Geelong Scottish club began running bucks nights, which were so successful that the women demanded a chance to attend, and so fortnightly dances were run throughout the soccer season as a means of fund-raising and as a community activity. The Croatian and later North Geelong soccer clubs provided neutral grounds where the various factions - nationalist, democratic, religious and labour movement - could meet for recreation. Bell Park Sports Club opened one of the largest function centres in Geelong, built almost entirely by voluntary labour in the 1970s.

Soccer did provide a form of upward social mobility for aspiring community leaders and businessmen in the immigrant communities. They saw soccer as a pleasure, they wanted to put something into the game, but they didn't know how to go about it. They saw soccer as part of their image. They came into the game to do something for the businesses with which they were involved. Businessmen, bank managers, insurance agents, lawyers, commercial people were associated with the game in an honorary capacity, and they tried to use soccer to further their business interests, by raising their status in their communities. They relied on the pull which soccer had over these communities.<sup>80</sup> Some established their status within soccer then branched out into the

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<sup>79</sup> An interesting reversal apparently occurred in Richmond where the removal of some trees from their new ground by the Wilhelmina Soccer Club resulted in an ugly brawl between factions of the Labor party and the DLP on Richmond Council in 1956. Janet McCalman, *op. cit.*, p. 284 and reference there to the *Richmond News*, 7, 14, 28 March 1956. This time it appears that soccer got caught up in local politics.

<sup>80</sup> Athanasios Hatzianestis (Sports Editor, Hellenic Herald) "I would like to tell you a story which to me is what soccer is all about. The story is about a Greek who is very big on the soccer scene in Australia now, and how he came to be involved in the sport. He told me that twenty years ago, he wasn't at all interested in soccer. Then one day, friends took him to watch a game; he was amazed at what he saw. He said he saw Greeks shouting and screaming and it was obvious to him that Greeks went to see a soccer game for other reasons than just to watch the players. They went to the game to release their emotions within the security of a crowd who spoke their own language and understood. He realized then that soccer was a big part in the emotional wellbeing of the Greeks. I remember his words: 'If soccer is so important to the Greeks here in Australia, then I'm going to devote myself to soccer.' He did just that." Quoted in Josef Vondra, *Hellas Australia*, Widescope, Melbourne, 1979, p. 196.

wider community, others had a community position, which they tried to enhance through soccer.<sup>81</sup> The route followed has to be established in each case.

As the clubs with which these individuals were involved rose to the top ranks in their respective State competitions they posed problems for the essentially amateur and Anglo administrations which governed the game. Top players from Europe came to Australia and found themselves in an amateur set up riven by class distinctions and prejudice. Soccer had no projected image in Australia at this stage. The Olympic Games in 1956 put the game on the map, with the top players from around the world taking part, including Russians like the legendary Lev Yashin. There were huge crowds for the soccer tournament, and the use of Melbourne Cricket Ground for the competition gave the game a focal point. Geelong players were being paid in the late 1950s.

Eventually the old amateur association was replaced by the Victorian Soccer Federation in 1962 and this body still runs the game in 1994. The Geelong clubs were persuaded to support the new body by John van Hoboken of the Dutch club Wilhelmina who paid a lobbying visit to Geelong. As Chris van Beek likes to tell it, the reward the Geelong clubs got for their support was to be removed from the Melbourne competition at the end of 1963 and sent back to play in the Ballarat and Geelong District League.

### **Conclusion**

This minority sport has been a significant influence in the life of many of the citizens of Geelong since the 1920s. If it has fallen far short of its potential in Australia, Victoria and Geelong this is not for want of effort, dedication and application by a number of very dedicated people. For them, as for an earlier generation, soccer was a very important part of their lives and formed an essential element in the processes by which they came to terms with this strange and subtle society which is Geelong today.

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<sup>81</sup> Bruno Grollo was involved with the Veneto Club, *Age* 25 August 1993, p. 13.