

FOOTY SCANDAL EXPOSED

The game **THAT NEVER WAS**

It was to be a dead rubber in Arctic conditions so the two teams coerced the umpires to call off the game, concocted a fake newspaper report as part of an elaborate cover-up and then vowed to keep the whole thing a secret. But 69 years later, the truth is finally out.

BEN COLLINS

Late in the 1945 season the *Geelong Advertiser* ran a story about a dramatic seconds match between Geelong and St Kilda.

But, far more dramatically, the game never actually took place.

Col Hutchinson – AFL statistician and historian and ardent Cats fan – stumbled upon this intriguing revelation 20 years ago during a conversation with W.H. ‘Bob’ Walker, one of the chief conspirators.

Walker played 14 senior games for Geelong over seven seasons (1933-39) and in 1945 was the 33-year-old captain-coach of the Cats’ seconds, which he would represent some 200 times and later guide to a premiership. ►

PHANTOM MATCH:

After keeping it secret for 69 years, former Geelong reserves player Alan Arnold has let the cat out of the bag about the 1945 clash that wasn’t.



The game THAT NEVER WAS

In his final years, Walker shared the story of the phantom match with Hutchinson, who was shocked by the admission, particularly given Walker's reputation for setting a strong example for young players.

When Walker remembered Hutchinson was an AFL employee, he only half-joked: "What am I telling you for? They might fine me."

The Cat was out of the bag.

In recent times, Hutchinson provided the details to the *AFL Record*, and further investigation found a rare, living participant (or, more accurately, a non-participant) whose recollections are priceless.

Alan Arnold (who, incidentally, played local cricket with Hutchinson many years ago) was perhaps the youngest player on either side at just 18 and featured prominently in the doctored *Geelong Advertiser* report.

"I'm not going to get anyone into trouble, am I?" asked Arnold, who lives just a few kilometres from Simonds Stadium.

Told it would be nigh on impossible, the 88-year-old said: "It would be pretty rough if the AFL punished us now, 70 years later. But if we did it these days, we'd be strung up."

In the final round of 1945 – the day before Japan surrendered, ending World War II – the Cats and Saints senior teams battled for the wooden spoon at Geelong, while their struggling seconds were scheduled to play at Ross Gregory Oval, near St Kilda's then headquarters at Junction Oval.

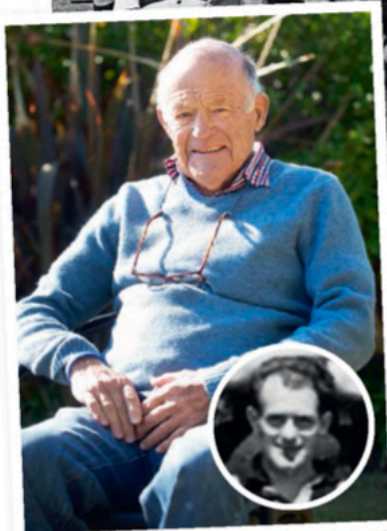
Arnold insists this was the venue but, curiously, the *Advertiser* article mentions Burnley Oval (Richmond). Perhaps it was part of the ruse.

It was a dead rubber – Geelong was 10th, St Kilda 11th (second last) – which, combined with the icy temperature, driving rain and the ground resembling a lake, made both teams question the point of it all. Arnold says the game could easily have been abandoned due to the "awful" conditions.

"The two coaches got together, probably with the umpire, too, and decided, 'Bugger this, let's give it a miss.' She was a non-event. But no harm done," he said.

"They didn't give us much money in those days – not enough to play in that, anyway."

Secrecy was important to avoid potential disciplinary reaction from the League.



IN COLLUSION: Geelong seconds captain-coach Bob Walker (top, in a 1937 Cats reserves team) and Alan Arnold (above, and during his country football days in the 1950s), both played key roles in the conspiracy.

were bribed for their complicity and silenced with liquor when the teams adjourned to a local hotel for the afternoon.

Arnold: "I wouldn't have put it past a few blokes in that side to do something like that."

However, it's unclear whether the reporter was an unwitting victim or a willing participant. *The Age*, *The Argus* and *The Football Record* were also conned into publishing the bogus scoreline.

In any case, it seems the sham story that was published in the *Advertiser* on the Monday – complete with quarter-by-quarter scores, best players, goalkickers and specific match scenarios – was concocted over a few ales.

It's hard not to giggle when reading it, right from the first fictitious sentence: "The condition of the Burnley Oval made the ball hard to handle but both teams made the game worth watching."

Of course, diplomacy dictated the result should be a draw – Geelong 12.6 to St Kilda 11.12.

It would have been inspiring if only it were true. A Geelong player



I played a great game. It said so in the paper ...

ALAN ARNOLD, 'HERO' OF THE FICTITIOUS MATCH

Arnold: "Bob Walker told us, 'We need you to keep it quiet.' And we did. Until now!"

There is a theory the umpires and the *Advertiser* reporter

named Toleman was said to have left the field with an ankle injury "and as Geelong had no 19th man they carried on with 17 men".

The phantom hero was teenager Arnold, who was credited with kicking the behind that drew the match – from a "difficult shot" after the final siren no less!

Arnold is happy to claim the credit.

"I played a great game. It said so in the paper, so it must've been true," he quipped.

"Crikey, it was a dramatic finish. It was a real effort to kick that point that levelled the scores.

"I was kicking into the breeze, about 70 yards out, up to my knees in water and I couldn't even swim."

Arnold was a teetotaler so, instead of going to the pub, he and a couple of teammates made a night of it by catching a show at the Tivoli Theatre in the city, before catching "the drunks' train" home around 11pm.

Arnold won the Geelong seconds' best and fairest in his only season at the club before pursuing his dream job as a wool classer.

He recalls: "I just played country footy after that. I played on some pretty rough grounds in the bush – some even worse than that day at Ross Gregory Oval – but we never called the game off. That was a one-off."

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IF YOU KNOW OF ANY UNTOLD FOOTY STORIES, EMAIL BEN.COLLINS@AFL.COM.AU.