

THE YEAR THE TIGER ROARED

Members of the 1934 Glenelg premiership team were reunited recently at a function at the Glenelg Football Club. Dion Hayman caught up with some of the Tiger heroes of yesterday.

The Glenelg Football Club has come a long way since the dim, dark and perhaps forgettable days of its early existence.

The Tigers were the chopping block of the league for many years. They entered the competition in 1921 and for four years lost every match — 56 of them.

But 1925 was to be the start of a long, arduous haul off the bottom of the ladder which eventually culminated in the club's maiden premiership in 1934.

Clem Hill, now 81, was a part of that rise to glory.

"I was in the first match that Glenelg ever won," Clem recalled.

"It was my first match.

"I never played in the Bs, that's how bad the Bays' team really was. "It was against West Torrens in 1925 after they went top in 1924," he said.

Glenelg, playing on their home soil, defeated West Torrens 12-6 (78) to 10-10 (70).

But the Tigers went down to Port at Alberton the following week by 10 points and coach "Stump" Pincombe was promptly sacked and replaced.

Glenelg's only other win for the year was against second-bottom side South Adelaide and they picked up their fifth successive wooden spoon. Glenelg finished seventh for the next five seasons, sixth in 1931, seventh in 1932 and sixth in 1933 before their rocket to stardom.

But it was a rise that was well disguised.

After five rounds, Glenelg was again bottom with only one draw to its credit. They had lost to Port by 131 points and were on a collision-course with another wooden spoon when an incredible turnaround halted the slide and sent them shooting towards the top.

Glenelg won 10 of its last 12 minor round games to win the double chance and a second semi-final showdown with Port Adelaide.

But the Tigers crashed to a 65-point loss.

"All the boys were too excited," recalled former champion centreman Len Sallis.

"They over-ran the ball, they played bad football, they didn't mark well and they couldn't kick.

"But when they settled down, they beat Sturt comfortably (in the preliminary final)."

Glenelg defeated Sturt 12-11 (83) to 9-16 (70) to earn another battle with the Magpies.

Coach Bruce McGregor remembered that most of the work done on the Thursday night before the match was in planning strategy instead of out on the track.

"There wasn't a player out on the ground more than half an hour on the Thursday night before the match because I'd figured that they'd had just about enough football for the year," he said.

Tactics were the key to a Glenelg triumph.

"We had a meeting on the Thursday night prior to the match and everybody voiced their own opinion about everything and I voiced mine," said Bruce.

The art of tagging is not a new innovation — Bruce McGregor successfully used it 52 years ago.

"We didn't call them taggers in those days — we call them shadows or close checkers," he recalled.

"So I gave two boys a job to do. Keith Oliver was one of them. Port Adelaide had two players who were match-makers, they were winners all the time — 'Bull' Reval and Vic Johnson.

"I gave (Keith) the job of watching Johnson and (Glen) Hale the job of watching Reval and they did the job I wanted and that broke up Port's open game."

Cheered on by a pro-Glenelg crowd, the Tigers kicked enough goals to stay about three goals clear of Port all day.

But Port produced a last-ditch attempt to snatch victory in the final quarter and mid-way through the term, tied the scores.

Len Sallis remembered the plan.

"We had instructions that if Port levelled with us, 'Blue' Johnston would go to the goalsquare and from the centre line forward, we were to kick it high," Len said.

"That is exactly what Glenelg did and the man in the action was Clem Hill, now playing his last match for Glenelg.

"There was a lad called Whitaker, he's my nephew, and he played on the half-back line," Clem said.

"The ball went right down near their goals and Murray Whitaker got it. He ran nearly to centre half-back and he kicked it right over centre where I marked it.

"I turned just enough to keep a big bloke out that played for Port — Ken Obst, he weighed about 16 stone — and I kicked it on and Bluey (Johnston) marked it.

Keith Oliver was standing just "a few yards" from Johnston when he leapt into the air and described it as one of the best marks he ever saw.

"The Port rover was going for a mark and Blue was behind him and went straight over him, took the mark and never even touched him," Keith said.

Blue Johnston said he was not nervous about the kick — after all, he was only 10 yards from goal. Johnston kicked truly and the Tigers goaled again before eventually running out nine-point winners.

And in the wild celebrations that followed, coach Bruce McGregor recalled how the team reacted.

"They treated me as one of the boys," he said.

"I wasn't the boss at all, I didn't want to be."

The streets of Glenelg disappeared under a mass of jubilation that night — Arthur Link was stunned.

"We had dinner in town and they must have put it over the wireless that we were coming down here," Arthur said.

"Moseley Square was just a sea of faces — you couldn't move."

But the year's work was now all worth it.

Every ounce of blood, sweat and tears had been rewarded with the ultimate prize — the premiership.



Len Sallis . . . highly rated Glenelg centreman who played in the south-east during the Depression.

It was lucky they were rewarded with the premiership, thought Clem Hill, because the monetary results were not as lucrative as they are today. "All I got was six rabbits!" said Clem Hill.