



WINTER OF '69

The 1969 SANFL Grand Final

Steve Barrett talks with Neil Kerley, Fred Phillis, Sandy Nelson, Malcolm Greenslade, Mike Nunan and, exclusively, with Richmond legend Royce Hart on the 50th anniversary of a remarkable premiership decider.



Royce Hart in the hands of trainers in his only game for Glenelg - the 1969 grand final.

It was a concerned Sturt coach Jack Oatey who warned a throng of approximately 300 club members at the February 1969 AGM the three-time reigning premier's "day of reckoning was almost here". With John Halbert, Tony Clarkson, Brenton Miels, Brian Schwarz, John Murphy, Malcolm Jones and Roger Dunn leaving after '68, Oatey's pessimism was justifiable. "No club can afford to lose so many players in one year," he said. "As for the premiership, I am not as confident as I was last year. It depends on how the new players fit into the team."

Star Double Blues centre half-back Sandy Nelson remembered: "We had half-a-dozen handy players all leave at the same time which had Jack concerned. There was a new look in '69 with (ruckman) Dean Ottens replacing 'Doc' Clarkson and Mick Nunan coming in because Roger Dunn retired. There was a changing of the guard but, typical Jack, he worked it all out and got the engine going again."

After finishing second to Glenelg after the minor round, Sturt progressed to its fifth successive grand final with a 38-point second-semi-final win over the Tigers. Glenelg responded by steamrolling West Adelaide in the preliminary final to earn another crack at the Blues in the decider, the Bays' first in 19 years. But unlike their second-semi defeat - or at any stage throughout 1969 - this time the Tigers had the ultimate ace at their disposal - champion Richmond centre half-forward Royce Hart.

One of only 27 Australian Football Hall of Fame Legends and selected at centre half-forward in the AFL's Team of the Century, Hart was basically the Wayne Carey of the '60s and '70s. "Royce was an incredible player," said Neil Kerley, the Bays' captain-coach in 1969. "He wasn't as strong as Wayne but he was just as damaging."

Hart's one and only SANFL appearance was for Glenelg - and happened to be in the biggest game of '69. "It divided opinion, didn't it?" mused Hart, who arrived in Adelaide four days before the decider. "I remember coming to the airport and I had to go around the back alley to get to my car."

Hart was 21 and fresh off playing in Richmond's 25-point VFL grand final victory over Carlton a week earlier, before 119,165 fans at the MCG. While the concept of a Victorian-based superstar today playing in AFL and SANFL deciders in consecutive weeks seems preposterous, in 1969, during the time of the Vietnam War, it was allowed.

While completing his National Service with the Royal Australian Artillery, Hart was, under Australian National Football Council regulations, entitled to play football in the State in which he was training in the Army. And he was based at Woodside Barracks in the Adelaide Hills.

"I don't think a lot of the diehard SA football supporters agreed with it but that was the law of the land," said Hart, who was paid a handsome \$2000 sum for his one-off appearance for the Bays, almost three times the \$700 he earned for the whole of 1967 when he helped steer Richmond to the VFL flag in his first season.

"At some stages during the week with the army situation, we'd go on enforced 10-mile marches with a 50-pound pack on our back. We'd stay in bivouac shelters and eat World War II bully beef. We won the (VFL) flag and I won the best-and-fairest and made the All-Australian side on that preparation, so stick all your dieticians and sports science theorists up your jumper! I went going backwards and forwards (between SA and Victoria) and trained once a week with Glenelg."



That's four in a row as Sturt captain Bob Shearman is presented with the premiership flag and trophy.

Kerley was super-keen for Hart to be a Tiger in both States. "I picked up a scent that Royce was over here," Kerley said. "I chatted with him well before the finals and talked him into playing for us if he was available. We were hoping to get Royce at the end of the minor round because Richmond had done some miraculous things and won their last four games to make the top four - which they did! Instead of us getting Hart for all the finals, we didn't get him until the grand final."

That was just one of a remarkable sequence of events which led to Hart's one-game cameo. Had Richmond bowed out earlier, as expected, Hart would have been a SANFL Tiger much sooner. Had West and West Torrens not drawn their first semi-final (in those days drawn finals were replayed the following week), pushing the entire finals series back a week, Hart wouldn't have played at all given the VFL and SANFL deciders were originally scheduled for the same Saturday. Also, had the Bays lost their preliminary final against the Bloods, Hart could - and would - have played the grand final for West.

Technically he also would have been eligible to represent the Double Blues but their earlier refusal to guarantee him selection saw Hart side with Glenelg. "I didn't make the choice. Sturt made the choice," Hart explained. "I'd trained there a couple of nights and their chairman of selectors, 'Candles' (Clayton) Thompson, met with Graeme Richmond, the powerbroker at Richmond. During the meeting Candles said to Graeme they couldn't guarantee I'd get a game. Graeme said 'you couldn't what?!' and stormed out, so I went to Glenelg."

Nelson maintains Sturt did the right thing: "Jack would never have done it. It could have been anybody, Jack wouldn't

have upset the team dynamics. No way."

Other Double Blues were more sympathetic to Hart's situation, particularly Nunan and full forward Malcolm Greenslade who both briefly teamed with Hart at Richmond in the early '70s. "Royce would become a colleague when I did National Service," said Greenslade, who snared a mark-of-the-century nomination in his 1971 VFL debut against St Kilda before outshining Hart with six majors a week later against South Melbourne. "The ruling was you became what we now call a free agent in the State where you did your training."

Nunan said: "I had no problem with it (Hart playing) because when I got conscripted and was based in Melbourne, I played for Richmond. I understood the circumstances and the rules. It was to Glenelg's fortune and was quite fair in my opinion."

Rival captains Kerley and Bob Shearman got off striking charges from the second semi-final - "they were piss-fart reports and there was nothing in them," Kerley offers - to lead their sides on grand final day. While escaping the wrath of the tribunal, Kerley almost didn't take the field for what was his last game, after injuring his driver muscle during the week, hampering his ability to use his good foot on the big day.

"I'd never pulled a muscle in my leg in my life," said Kerley who joked he "had about 36 handballs" in the decider (he had 14 a lot for one player in those days). "Then Thursday night, towards the end of training, I felt something go in the front quad. I tried to kick and jeez, I thought someone had shot me. You might say I shouldn't have played ... but I did play, simple as that."



Sturt's Malcolm Greenslade booted nine goals in the 1969 grand final.



Rick Schoff with master coach Jack Oatey after the record-breaking win.

The Blues, who won the toss and kicked to the Cathedral end, started spectacularly when Greenslade goaled inside 30 seconds. When rovers Nunan and Roger Rigney made it three in five minutes, the Tigers were floundering. Their plight worsened when Hart was famously knocked out cold after his head was accidentally collected by Sturt wingman Trevor Clarke's knee, eight minutes in. Nelson, Hart's direct opponent and also wearing No.11, had the best view in the house. "I get asked about that incident from time to time," he said. "The ball was almost running out-of-bounds and as Hart was chasing it, I might have encouraged a bit of movement by pushing him over the boundary line, causing him to stumble forward at pretty full-on pace. Clarke was just trying to stop his run and Hart's head hit Clarke's knee. That's how I saw it. There was no malice in it. It happened in a split-second and Hart was in Disneyland."

Nunan said: "He (Clarke) was one of our less aggressive people and it was accidental. He (Hart) had concussion. These days you wouldn't be able to continue." Kerley recalled: "Clarke was going for the ball and accidentally caught Royce right on the chin and knocked him out. There was nothing wrong there ... if there was, don't worry, I would have decked him! I was right there and saw it clear as a bell."

As for Hart, he understandably had no recollection of the incident, nor a half-time conversation he had with Alf Brown, the Melbourne Herald's chief football writer, who was covering the match. "I could say he belted me with a clenched fist but I know he didn't," Hart laughed. "I don't remember anything about it. I saw Alf Brown a few weeks later and he mentioned coming in and speaking to me at half-time - I couldn't remember talking to him."

One of the great SANFL fallacies is that Hart's afternoon ended then and there but he never left the ground and, after coming to, had a productive afternoon, finishing with 21 kicks, a match-high 10 marks and two goals. Kerley said Hart played an "incredible game with what he suffered", however Nelson saw it differently, recalling Hart was "running all over the place, kick-chasing, trying to justify the coin he was being paid".

Sturt led by a commanding 24 points at quarter-time before Glenelg launched a short-lived second-term challenge. Full forward Fred Phillis converted a free and Peter Marker goaled on the run but otherwise the Tigers self-sabotaged with shoddy finishing and the Double Blues led by 27 points at half-time, thanks largely to best-afield Paul Bagshaw's brilliant quarter, which included a magnificent mark over Ken Smith and Brian Colbey. "Baggy was as naturally gifted a player as I've seen," Nelson said. "He could take a screamer over the top, give the ball off on the run, handball out of packs, half-volley it, kick with either foot ... he wasn't a quick player but he was beautifully balanced and a real 'big-game' player."

In the third quarter Hart produced his best moment when he goaled after a trademark towering goalsquare mark over Tony Burgan. Newly-crowned Magarey Medallist Phillis then outmarked Terry Short and nailed his 135th major of 1969, breaking legendary Ken Farmer's 33-year record for most goals in a season. Glenelg fans ran on to



Glenelg's Fred Phillis with his Magarey Medal in 1969.

"At some stages during the week with the army situation, we'd go on enforced 10-mile marches with a 50-pound pack on our back."

- Royce Hart

the ground to congratulate the Bays spearhead, who had been violently ill that morning. "I nearly didn't play. I've got a pretty tough guts but I woke up at 4am vomiting," Phillis recalled. "I'd had lunch the day before at a hotel in the city and got ill. But once you hit the field, you've got other things on your mind. I always kicked goals on (Sturt full back) Bruce Jarrett but it (five) wasn't enough - I needed more than that." Phillis's record-breaking day (he finished the season with 137 goals) isn't one he looks back on with fondness.

Another individual record was notched in the last quarter when Greenslade, who had hooked a six-pointer from Shearman's pass to give Sturt a 47-point three-quarter-time buffer, again goaled from a Shearman assist, the Blues spearhead marking over Graham Cornes just outside the goalsquare. It was Greenslade's ninth major, equalling the grand final record of former Sturt forward and near-namesake Gordon "Grassy" Green, who booted 9.1 in 1932. "Much later, we (Greenslade and Green) were interviewed together and had a photo shoot," said Greenslade, who as a kid used to climb through the fences around Unley Oval, which was two blocks from where he grew up on Duthy Street in Parkside. "I've got a picture of it in my scrapbook."

Greenslade could have had the grand final record to himself, had he not been ignored by long-bombing half-forward John "Diamond Jim" Tilbrook, who kicked four goals, some reporters adjudging him best-afield. "In '69 everything just seemed to fall into place on the day, with one exception," Greenslade said. "During that last quarter, I led for the ball but Tilbrook bypassed me and kicked the goal himself. I thought 'you little' That would have been 10."

Kerley felt Oatey was influential in Greenslade's matchwinning haul: "Jack had a very good plan. Instead of Greenslade leading to the flank where the ball was coming from, he led the other way into open space - and they found him. Very smart man, Jack. I learnt a lot from him. They were just too good on the day... we couldn't match them."

Marker slotted a set shot inside the final minute but the day belonged to silky-skilled Sturt, its 24.15 (159) still the highest in SANFL grand finals. The Sunday Mail's front page headline screamed, "The Blues! That's four in a row!" - incredibly, a mere seven months after Oatey's pessimistic pre-season forewarning. At the premiership dinner, Sturt chairman Ray Kutcher said it best: "Britain had its Churchill, Science had its Newton, baseball had its Babe Ruth and Aussie Rules has its Oatey."

Go Maggies!

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