

was after the Roys beat the Scrays at Princes Park in the final qualifying round of the '80s – Round 22, 1989 – with merger talks between the two clubs loitering suspiciously around the corner.

FITZROY	1.0	6.2	6.4	9.4	58
FOOTSCRAY	2.4	2.5	6.6	8.6	54

*Goals:* Fitzroy – G Lazarus 4, R Rogerson 2, B Beatty 1, G Calverley 1, D Hellings 1. Footscray – M Hobbs 3, T Whitten 2, B Gray 1, B Smith 1, K Stevens 1. Attendance: 16,998

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**Junction Oval, Round 22, 1984 (September 1)**

# FINALS FLING AFTER FOND FAREWELL TO JUNCTION

It was a day that had everything, and then some. Fitzroy's dramatic, last-minute entry into the top five; a second successive century of goals by the great Bernie Quinlan; and the final VFL/AFL match at the Junction Oval.

In his quirky *The Best of Football Trivia*, Marc Fiddian noted the Round 10 *Football Record* featured an advertisement for the film *Against All Odds* opposite a VFL ladder showing Fitzroy stuck on the bottom with one win from nine games. From that point on, the Lions won 10 of 13 matches – including their last six – to sneak into the five at the 11th hour.

Coach Robert Walls told *The Canberra Times* that even in Fitzroy's gloomiest period, after a 10-goal thrashing by Essendon, he requested the players finish the season on a good note by winning five of their last six games (in shades of 1982, also after a thrashing at Windy Hill). Walls

said: "As soon as I said that, three or four players said: 'Why not six out of six?' That's why today's game was their game – they owned the game."

With a 5-11 win-loss record after the Bombers debacle, the Roys were 10th – a position they occupied from Rounds 10 to 18. Despite Walls' optimism, word has it that stalwarts Scott Clayton, Mick Conlan, Leon Harris and Laurie Serafini were told to have "end-of-season" operations so that they were well prepared for 1985. The Lions had climbed to seventh by Round 21, meaning the only time they were actually in the five was at the end of the qualifying season.

Never before, or since, has a team made the finals after recording just one victory from its opening nine or five from its first 16 matches. The *Football Record* drew parallels with the 1916 season. "Fitzroy's rise to the five this year is without precedent in post-war football. The Roys' effort in taking the 1916 pennant after winning just two (and drawing one of 12) home-and-away games is probably the only other such amazing late-season recovery in VFL history."

The VFL match-day program said the Lions were helped by a very even season and the inconsistency of their fifth-spot rivals. "Melbourne's run came to a halt, Richmond and the Swans collapsed, while Geelong and Footscray merely bumbled their way around fifth place in the absence of more legitimate challenges." However, Fitzroy still needed the Cats and Dogs to lose their Round 22 matches against guaranteed finalists Hawthorn and Collingwood.

After a 25-goal shootout in the first half at Waverley – typical of 1980s' Hawthorn-Geelong clashes – the reigning premiers slammed on 7.7 to nothing to have the Cats 62 points down and out of contention at three-quarter-time.

It was a tighter affair at Collingwood, the Magpies leading the Bulldogs by just eight points at the last change. *The Age's* Garry Linnell summed up how the stars were about to align. "A buzz went through the (Fitzroy) crowd six minutes into the final quarter ... transistors around the ground were at full volume when (Collingwood's) Ron Andrews kicked a goal at Victoria Park." The Woods went on with the business, booting 6.3 to 0.4 to end Footscray's season, with every Magpie goal

cheered – surely a first-and-last for Fitzroy fans. The Lions, Cats and Dogs all finished with an 11-11 record, but the Roys had an 8-9% advantage over the “raining pair”.

Richard Osborne starred with 27 disposals, his five-goal haul serving notice of future prodigious goalkicking feats. With Conlan out, Mickey's “physical understudy”, Doug Barwick, kicked four and was described by Linnell as “Conlanesque” for his strength in the packs and running power.

Walls told *The Sun News-Pictorial's* Greg Baum: “I'm really thrilled for their (youngsters) sake. We were down and out and we copped a bit of flak, but they stuck together throughout and I'm really rapt.” One of those youngsters, rover Bernie Harris, debuted in the Round 17 victory over Hawthorn and had now enjoyed six consecutive victories to kick-start his career. However, Bernie had nothing on older brother Leon, missing due to surgery, who began with nine straight wins in Rounds 5-13, 1979!

And we can't forget Superboot. Unlike the previous year when he had to wait until midway through the final term to record goal No.100, Quinlan kicked the required three majors in the first 18 minutes – all from 40m set-shots. His 100th came after a spectacular mark over Saints Danny Frawley and Michael Roberts following a long Gary Pert drop punt.

This time, Quinlan's milestone was reached at the Albert Park Lake end (he'd done so towards the Fitzroy Street goal in 1983), but there was still the same enthusiastic crowd invasion to herald the achievement. Of the sea of banners, flags and placards bearing the great man's first name, ABC TV commentator Don Hyde enthused: “I've never seen so many Bernie signs. Everyone's carrying a Bernie sign!” Quinlan said in typically laconic fashion: “I didn't feel too bad at all when I went back and lined it (the 100th) up. I'd had a couple of practice shots!”

The evergreen Quinlan, in Game No.326, became the seventh player to reach the ton in back-to-back seasons, following Gordon Coventry, Bob Pratt, Ron Todd, John Coleman, Peter Hudson and Peter McKenna. His 116 of the team's 409 goals (24 games) in 1983 and an eventual 105 of 367 (23) in 1984 represented a remarkably similar 28.36 and 28.61% of the Lions' season tallies.

FOURTH QUARTER

In his reflection of Fitzroy's epic 1983 season on the Footy Almanac website, a story which also touched on Lions champions of the corresponding era, Philip Mendes referenced a feature by the *Herald Sun's* Jon Anderson on the AFL's "longevity superstars". Paul Roos – a teammate for the great man's final five seasons – told Anderson he rated Quinlan as the best of the top 10 in terms of league games played (Bernie's 366 is currently No.10). Roos noted "he won a Brownlow as a midfielder and kicked 100 goals twice at full-forward, and that's why he's my No.1; an even better version of (Sydney's) Adam Goodes."

Forced into "co-tenancy" at Victoria Park as part of the VFL's ground rationalisation scheme, Fitzroy farewelled the Junction in far-better fashion than when it began its residency, a 110-point loss to St Kilda in Round 2, 1970. Whether by accident or design, the Lions played the Saints – the venue's "traditional owners" – in both their first and last home games. The Roys won 75 of 135 matches there between 1970 and 1984, a respectable 55.56%-win rate. As an aside, champion rover Garry Wilson's 108 games (equalled by St Kilda's Harry Lever) and 200 goals (the Saints' Bill Mohr, with 397, kicked the most) were Fitzroy records at the venue.

The 734th-and-last clash at the Junction Oval was also notable for there being nine players – six Lions and three Saints – who had stints at both clubs. Seven were still at their original clubs, with only Fitzroy big men Garry Sidebottom and Mark Scott having already switched camps.

Alas, Collingwood – briefly Fitzroy's friend when it overran Footscray in the final term – sadly resorted to type when it demolished the Lions in the last quarter of the elimination final. This was the Roys' fifth successive finals loss to the Pies since the glorious 1922 Grand Final.

FITZROY	5.9	11.12	19.17	24.20	164
ST KILDA	3.1	7.10	9.11	15.17	107

*Goals:* Fitzroy – R Osborne 5, B Quinlan 5, D Barwick 4, B Harris 2, G Pert 2, G Wilson 2, B Gotch 1, M Rendell 1, M Scott 1, D Turner 1. St Kilda – T Lockett 4, T Barker 2, G Cunningham 2, G Lane 2, P Morwood 2, P Cronan 1, A Cross 1, P Temay 1. Attendance: 15,156