



Football stories from country Victoria

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project artist



I happened to read, by chance really, a report from a parliamentary inquiry into the challenges facing country football in Victoria. One of the recommendations was around the importance of social history and the need to record some of those memories. I thought I could do something around that. I grew up in country Victoria where football is more than just a game. It's a big part of the vernacular. *Football Stories* is a series of 21 short films, not just about the stuff that happens on the paddock but the broader community dimension of country football. It was an epic project but right from the start, it was one of those excellent ideas that people instinctively understood.

I started by convening a discussion with the Victorian Country Football League (VCFL) and I suggested they talk to the State Library of Victoria. Then we all got together and talked about getting funds. For the VCFL this process of working with an artist was a whole new idea so it took a while to shape the project. There were things that they were very good at but there were a whole lot of other things

that they'd never done before and they were happy to take guidance.

Having a big cultural institution like the State Library on board was invaluable because of all their experience in knowing how to target government, manage materials and connect with other influential organisations. The library worked with the VCFL in all those areas and assisted with other things like the training of regional staff to generate an ongoing collection of stories.

I've found from experience that when you're gathering funds and support, it's good to have something upfront that will get everyone inspired and give them an idea of what you're talking about. The best way to do it is to show them something. For this project, I showed a three-minute film I'd made a while back for a regional council about a country football dynasty in the Mallee. And I showed another story I'd done a few years ago with an old jockey about the disappearing racecourses in north west Victoria.

These films gave people a sense of what this thing might look like in terms of memory and storytelling around country football. So for all the initial meetings, I made sure I had a laptop and a projector. And that was really successful.

We also wanted to get investment, not cash investment but emotional investment, from a whole range of peak bodies that in turn had connections with other peak bodies. We

had a very good reference group that was convened by the State Library and the VCFL. It included the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, the Public Records Office Victoria and the Public Libraries Board. The group had some excellent ideas and connections. I always like to ask reference groups a lot of questions! Most importantly, the VCFL had a really impressive state-wide structure that made identifying narratives and storytellers much easier than it often is.

The films took about 12 months to make. I had a little team but by and large I did it myself. We covered the whole state. We wanted stories from all different parts of Victoria and from a range of different football clubs as well.

Meeting all the people in these communities was the really enjoyable part of it from my point of view. It probably takes 50 to 100 people to make a football club run successfully. They're all troopers who've been doing this voluntary work for years and years. They have interesting things to say about the places they come from and they understand the connection between the history of that place and what its future might be. So these were really rewarding conversations to have.

One of the stories is about a bloke who had just played his 600th game for a club down in south west Victoria. This is a bloke in his 50s, you know. He should know better but his argument is that they just needed people to make up the numbers, in the reserves especially. He still enjoyed it and he figured that if he paraded his carcass out onto the field every week, it was a good example for everybody else. It's really just about keeping the club going and giving back what you got when you were young.

Football is the lifeline of communities. In many cases, it's the difference between a place falling off the map and not falling off. But it's amazing how long the teams will survive really. They just keep on hanging on.

