



FROGMAN CROAKS IN BAY DISASTER

22 March That's a Jim Ellis headline. Jim was a bloke I worked with at Cassell's in the 1960s, a wise, gentle, witty man. He died, far too young, in 1979. I'm sure David Grigg remembers him. Death and decrepitude are on my mind today, sorry. My father would have been 85 today. It's exactly twenty years since Sally agreed to marry me; we sort of celebrated the occasion, which I'd forgotten about until I mentioned my father's birthday just now, by her chauffeuring me to Dr Fairlie's dental establishment in High Street, Northcote, where my five remaining native teeth were ritually removed.

You dispute the word 'ritually'? You reckon I put it in just for alliteration? Not at all. 'There won't be any pain,' said Dr Fairlie; 'you'll just feel a bit of pressure as I...' In other words, *This won't hurt a bit* — and if that's not ritual, I don't know what is. I made a few primitive noises, the only sort I could manage actually, during this preliminary separation of old comrades that had spent half a century bonding, then said courteously 'I'm glad there wasn't any pain.' Dr Fairlie smiled. He smiles a lot anyway, but I mention this because I have always found that it is a good thing to keep dentists happy — dentists, and anyone else approaching one's body in a professional capacity with sharp instruments. But don't make them laugh! That's as dangerous as making them angry. Just keep them happy. Oh, the quips that spring to mind just as the nurse is about to put the needle in! If I could remember them all, you'd die laughing.

That's enough of that. Let's talk about football. Better still, let Irwin Hirsh talk about football.

TRUE BLUE

A letter from Irwin Hirsh

I see that my school experiences differ to yours, at least as far as football goes. Carlton is the team I barrack for. For me it had nothing to do with liking the name or anything, for my parents support the team. (I must admit that I hesitated to

tell you this. Not because Essendon beat Carlton in the 93 Grand Final, but because of your mention of Doug Nicholls. Doug reportedly tried out with Carlton and was rejected on racial grounds.)

Also, I was hardly ever the last chosen in a football match. But I wasn't the first kid chosen, either. Usually you'd find me in the mid-range of players. I wasn't an overly skilled football player, didn't have a good kick, but I could read the play quite well. And by choice I played in defence. Everyone else wanted to play up forward, to be there kicking goals but I willingly chose not to be part of that. Essentially I knew that in front of goal I lost any ability to kick the ball, and if I was going to enjoy my football I had to be out of the goal-kicking range. What this all meant is that I developed good defensive skills, when everyone else couldn't have cared less for the things. So it was that I could be relied upon to punch the ball away, to mark or touch the ball just before it was going to go through the opponents' goal, to intercept handpasses, and so on.

But more than anything I was a confidence player, a factor which was my greatest attribute and my greatest hindrance. If I could get a couple of good touches of the ball at the start of the play, I'd have a good game. But if things started off badly I would lose any abilities I had. This was never better tested than when I was in grade 6 and was at a new school. The concept of having to prove my abilities was too much for me to bear and in the first three inter-house weekly matches I had lousy games. Coming into the fourth game the house captain told me that if I didn't play well I wouldn't be playing in the fifth game. I probably shouldn't have been playing in the fourth game, but the team list was such that only one person was ever on the sidelines and my house hadn't won a game yet and the captain had a surfeit of people he could drop.

I took up my customary position at the back pocket, wondering how I'd go in this match. At the ball-up the opposition's rover got the ball and

started running down the field. As he did so I noticed that one of his team mates was standing unguarded at centre-half-forward, about 25 or 30 metres away from me. I immediately recognised who the rover was going to kick the ball to and could sense that the CHF was going to wait for the ball to come to him rather than run to meet it. There was a chance that I could get that ball, so I started to run, hard, and successfully marked the ball in front of the CHF. I'd ran so fast that by the time I slowed down in my follow-through I was a further 20 metres down the field, and I realised that if I went back to take my kick I probably wouldn't be able to kick the ball this far. So I decided to play on (this, mind you, was the time when you always went back to take your kick after a mark). I ran up the field, bounced the ball once, then a second time, then spotted a team mate all by himself. My kick went straight to him, probably my best ever kick of a football, and he turned around and kicked a goal.

After that I played a great game, though I don't remember anything specific about what I did. All I know is that having made a split-second decision to go for the ball, and having successfully backed my judgement, I started down the road upon playing a great game.

Years later I got a job with my beloved Carlton Football Club. I was there editing videotapes. One day I was having a chat with the club psychologist about the areas where our two positions fit together. And he tells me that one of the things which separate the top, elite sportspeople from the rest is the ability to visualise how they look when they are playing. The top sportspeople can see how they are playing, almost as if they are a spectator watching themselves play. Part of my job was to assist him in helping the team's players to visualise their own play. And as the psychologist was telling me this I was thinking back to that day in grade 6, because to this day I can remember knowing how I looked as I completed that play. It was like I was on the sidelines, being my own coach, telling myself to run for the ball, and play on, and spotting my team mate. For perhaps 20 or 30 seconds I was up there with the best Aussie Rules players of the day. □

There you are, Bruce, some really good stuff about sport to liven up ANZAPA, just as you're always asking for.

I'm glad Irwin mentioned Essendon's victory in the 1993 AFL Grand Final. I seem to have overlooked mentioning it in my excitement at the time. I reckon they did it for me, to mark my fifty years of devotion to the club. Last Saturday night they did it all over again, beating Adelaide in the night Grand Final. That was a terrific night. Sally was out with friends, so I taped the

programs we normally watch on Saturday night, and watched the entire match. But I didn't listen to it. For three hours I watched Essendon and listened to Elisabeth Schwarzkopf. Bliss! I enjoyed it so much I almost forgot my toothache. But that's enough of that.

Last night I watched my other team, briefly. The 'match of the week' on ABC TV was Sheffield United vs Manchester City, which in AFL terms is about the equivalent of Brisbane vs Sydney: good teams (they have to be, to be in the Premier League), but less than magic to watch. Before that we got a round-up of earlier matches, in one of which Sheffield Wednesday (0) was somewhat outplayed by Manchester United (5). I switched off, listened to a sad string quartet and pondered dentistry and the odd ways of cats.

Dylan's ashtray

I was delighted to read in the fan press that Roman Orszanski and Sue Peukert took delivery on 23 February of a baby boy, whom they have named Dylan. Dylan Bangsund (as he is known at the Pascoe Vale Veterinary Hospital, though I think Dylan Yeoland might be more apt) is of course honored by this further recognition of his standing in feline fandom, which he attributes in part to his longevity, which in turn he attributes to his being cuddled when young by Ursula Le Guin, Susan Wood and Bill Rotsler, and totally ignored by Carey Handfield. He and I have lately learnt that Robert Allen Zimmerman changed his name to Bob Dylan because of his admiration for Dylan Thomas, so there's now no doubt who he is named after, and if anything he sleeps more soundly than ever. In his twentieth year, however, Dylan has learnt a new trick, and though it says much for his intelligence, I'm almost embarrassed to mention it. In this house, you see, we have a door that separates the bedrooms and bathroom at the front from the kitchen, living-room and toilet at the back. Sally keeps this door closed to stop my smoke getting into the bedrooms, which is fair enough, but it confuses Dylan when he is at the back of the house, because his cat-tray is in the bathroom. In recent weeks he has solved this problem: in the toilet I have an ashtray, so he uses my ashtray as a kind of porta-potty. His aim is remarkably good, but I wish I hadn't started talking about this at all.

25 March Dr Fairlie tells me I must go another six weeks without teeth, time to let my ravaged gums heal and harden before a lower denture is fitted. I am trying to be philosophical about this. I think of the weight I have lost on my diet of soup and yoghurt and chardonnay. I think of *no toothache again, ever* (yes, I know there will be other ailments). I dream of chicken and prawns and nuts and crunchy things.