

The 1989 Grand Final between Hawthorn and Geelong had so much incident, so many stories. It was so hectic and high scoring. Hawthorn were the old pros, playing in their 7<sup>th</sup> successive grand final and aiming for back to back premierships for the first time in their history. Geelong were the up and comers, with a freakish full forward on fire (Gary Ablett). It was the final that delivered right from the first bounce when Mark Yeates shirt fronted Dermott Brereton to the very last kick of the game. It is certainly a game that will go down in history as one of the all-time great games.



It can also be a moment, and as recent as 2017 a moment that was well talked about and debated amongst many far and wide was that of the Adelaide Crows power stance throughout the final series. From the staunch AFL historians, to the former players of the game, to even the group of gentlemen that get together at the local café each and every Monday morning to dissect each game, it was the topic of conversation amongst many. The point of the stance was to create higher respect for the anthem, as well as lifting the team's performance in the first quarters throughout the finals.



There is no doubt that there is a distinct difference between home and away games and finals. Ask anyone about their favourite final's moment during their lifetime, and their eyes will light up and they will be able to recollect each moment. For many of us our childhood was spent the night before a grand final watching as much of the footy marathon as we could before falling asleep. The very next day was like Christmas morning in our household, a BBQ breakfast and lunch with family and friends, and then finding our 'spot' for the day with a perfect view of the television, as we sat in readiness for the pre-match entertainment, before the bounce of the ball and the roar of the crowd echoed across the television.

This week's challenge for players is to ask your parents/guardians, grandparents or even your coaches of a finals game that they can distinctly remember - 'google' it, watch it and learn from it. There is no better way to learn about the game and the pressure of finals football than to watch some of the all-time greats that took to the hallowed MCG before your time. Delve into football past – it's not going to hurt you – in fact you may just enjoy it.

Finals footy is hard contested footy. Lots of tackles, hard ball gets, the pressure is on and there is just nothing like it. The atmosphere of the crowd, the knowing that there might be a next week to go to the footy. Finals footy holds a special place in people's memories.

You can smell finals footy. Whether this is because it's the end of the cooler winter months, and the smell of spring is in the air. It's more likely the energy and vibe around each football club as the excitement builds for their team going into the final's series. It's important that every footballer's preparation is at its best. Whether its extra recovery, studying the opposition or extra time on the track after training fine tuning your craft – the key to success both as an individual but also a team is preparation. Nevertheless, it's a fantastic time of the year for all footballers, coaches and supporters involved in finals football, as clubs move closer and closer week by week to holding that premiership cup aloft.

Successful teams will adapt and thrive – for some players, they have been waiting for finals football for 6 months! Rigid and cautious teams will fail. There is a point in finals where you just have to trust your instinct and take the game on. The game can/will be at times chaotic as the crowd noise seems to get louder and louder. No matter what final (whether it be local, NAB or AFL) the crowd's energy is electric and the stands fill with colour and enthusiasm, all encouraging the players to bring their A Game.

At NAB League level; all eyes of the football world will be on you in the coming weeks – starting this weekend with the Wildcard round. It's important to ensure that all games are played in good spirit and fair play. Therefore, it's important to remember that your actions aren't just individual they are also team-based and could affect the outcome of a final.

It's important that players can block out the 'external noise' that somehow seems to get louder around finals time. The expectations are raised through the roof both from the individual but also those around him/her. For small country towns that live or breath football, a team can either make or break a town's spirit around finals times. It's vital that players trust the coaches and the staff and are able to block out that external noise and play to those structures that have stood them in good stead all year.

Your club, your coaches, your staff, your team mates trust you to go into battle for them and with them. Savour every second of the game, as you run out onto the ground take a big deep breath, settle the nerves and play football the only way you know how – with determination, belief, spirit and passion and most importantly remember to have some FUN!