

Harry Rowe

AFLUA Life Member

Harry Rowe's debut match for Melbourne received little press. Most of the news of 3 September 1945 was reporting the surrender of Japan and the ending of the Second World War. The round 20 match against Fitzroy was the Demons last for season and Harry did not get another chance at senior football until round 7 the following year, again against Fitzroy, another loss and the final match of his senior playing career.

Rowe had been recruited from VAFA premier Melbourne High School Old Boys and was also a good cricketer playing 81 First XI matches for Richmond in the VCA, a term that included twice runners-up.

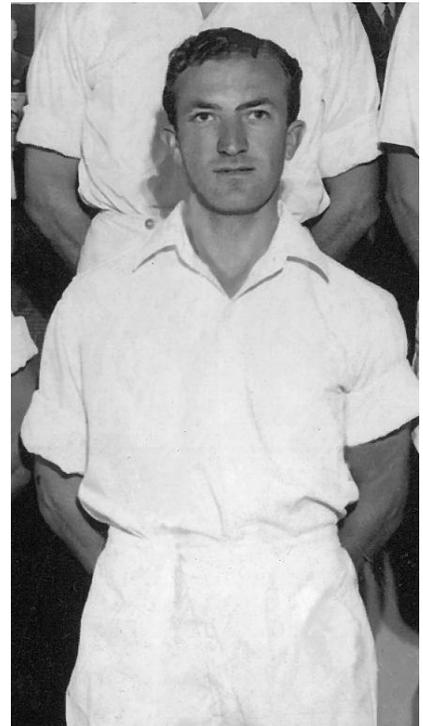
In 1948 Harry took up field umpiring with the VFL Second Eighteens and the following season he was promoted to the senior list as more and more country competitions came back following the war. He finished that season with the first of 17 grand finals.

Breaking through into the second eighteens in 1950 he consolidated his place and in round 3, 1951 he was appointed to his first VFL senior match - South Melbourne versus Essendon at the Lake Oval.

There was reportage of this first game and in particular the missiles that were hurled by the crowd. As *The Argus* noted

Bottles, beer glasses, apples, and pieces of bluemetal were flung by angry spectators at the field umpire, Harry Rowe....None of the missiles hit umpire Rowe, who was in charge of his first League match. In the last quarter, when South were making their astonishing recovery, Bill Brittingham, Essendon full-back, in trying to clear his goal, kicked the ball against a South Melbourne player. It rebounded into the hands of another South forward, who popped it through goal. Rowe recalled the ball and gave a free kick to South rover, Bill Williams, farther out. This angered a section of the crowd behind the goals, and bottles and beer glasses were thrown over the fence. The demonstration against the umpire was premature, as Williams goaled from the free kick.

The match, which earned him Heritage Number 214, was the start of a senior career that came in short bursts over the ensuing five seasons: 1951 3 matches, 1953 3 matches, 1954 8 matches and 1955 2 matches.



Perhaps the most remarkable was the final of Harry's senior matches. Fitzroy played Geelong at Brunswick Street. Fitzroy forward Tony Ongarello had scored two early goals with wobbly punts and then both sides kicked poorly. Eventually Ongarello took two marks late in the game and from both proceeded to place-kick goals. They are the last two majors to be scored in such a fashion in the VFL/AFL.

Despite not returning to senior football Harry completed another eight years umpiring in the country compiling an impressive tally of matches and finals. It was not always easy. Harry injured his arm in the first quarter of the 1955 Goulburn Valley Second Semi-final after falling down. He bounced for the rest of the quarter and then threw the ball up for the rest of the game after receiving treatment at quarter-time.

When Harry hung up the umpiring boots at the close for the 1963 season his senior list record stood at 16 VFL, 27 second eighteens, 244 VCFL, 25 Tasmanian and 3 Metropolitan matches, including 48 finals over 15 seasons.

Harry was awarded life membership of the AFLUA in 1959

Born Henry Gordon Rowe in St.Kilda on 2 February 1925 Harry lived a full, rich 89 years. He was a regular at functions until a few years ago but always had umpiring close to his heart. He passed away on 1 April 2014.