**Ideas and Society Program**

**Tuesday, 7 August 2012**

**Mick Malthouse and Martin Flanagan – Thinking Football**

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| **John Dewar** |
| Welcome everyone. I’d like to begin by acknowledging the Wurundjeri as the traditional owners of the land on which we’re gathered today and pay my respects to their elders, past and present.  It’s a real pleasure to welcome you all here today, and in particular to welcome someone who’s got into the spirit of the event and worn their footy scarf. Rob Manne is especially pleased to see that it’s a Geelong scarf, because I’ve just learned that he’s been a Geelong supporter since the age of four. So, you’re very welcome, everyone.  It’s my role to introduce two people who probably need no introduction, but I’ll give it a go, nevertheless. One of the first tasks I had as Vice-Chancellor earlier this year was to announce the appointment of the first ever Vice-Chancellor’s Fellow here at La Trobe University, which as you know was none other than Michael Malthouse. Now this was an appointment that took some people by surprise, indeed I had to explain to an ABC producer at some length that in fact Michael had been appointed as a Vice-Chancellor’s Fellow, not as Vice-Chancellor. This producer said, well, what are you going to do? I’m sure that’s a role that Mick could discharge with great distinction, but he has the role of Vice-Chancellor’s Fellow in which capacity, he has been absolutely marvellous as a new member of the University community. He already has made himself much loved within La Trobe, through the work he’s done with students, the work he’s done in leadership development with staff, and in the outreach he’s done to schools. Many people were very surprised that we appointed Mick to this role, but in many ways the thinking behind it was that Mick has no previous association with a university and yet he’s widely known in the community and his capacity to take a message out to those communities and talk about the benefits of coming to a university, and his own feelings about being welcomed into the La Trobe community I think are really powerful messages.  Mick has a really deep commitment to education, and to the needs of young people, particularly those in our communities around us here in the north of Melbourne and in regional and rural Victoria, communities in which the aspirations to succeed in life through the sort of high quality tertiary education we offer here have not always been fully realised. Most recently, Mick was present at the University’s launch, or the launch of the Koorie Academy of Excellence last week, which was also attended by the State Minister for Education.  There aren’t many events, or decisions in a university that a Vice-Chancellor makes that receive unsolicited feedback of a very positive kind, but I must say Mick’s appointment has been one of those. I regularly get emails from staff and from students, completely unsolicited, saying what a wonderful experience they’ve had, interacting with him.  Now, Mick is possibly in an accustomed role today and that is being on the receiving end of some questions from a very distinguished journalist, in this case, one of the doyens of Australian sports journalism, the highly respected Martin Flanagan. Like Mick, Martin has a deep passion for sport, but it’s a passion that he’s demonstrated many times through his journalism and through his creative writing and his biographies. It’s a passion that goes beyond the mechanics of the sport or the statistics, or who’s pulled a hammy, because I think a key feature of Martin’s writing, and those of you who are familiar with it will know this, is about how football relates to the wider Australian society in which it takes place, and in particular with a focus on the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. Those of you who are familiar with it, will know that his writing is intelligent, thought-provoking and often moving.  So we’re about to have the privilege of listening in on a conversation between Martin and Mick on the topic of Thinking Football, and I’m sure thinking will be central to this discussion. So please join me in welcoming Michael Malthouse and Martin Flanagan.  [applause] |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| Thank you very much for that kind introduction. Thank you also to Rob Manne who I regard as the Buddha Hocking of Australian intellectuals. Footy is amazing. Mick and I went for a leak on the way into here and we were at the urinal and a man pulled up and said how he’d met Bobby Skilton at the urinal at the Royal Children’s Hospital. So footy just makes for endless connections.  But Mick and I are going to have a chat. Because Mick has received so much media, I thought it would be interesting maybe to discuss a few things with him initially, that maybe aren’t so well known about him, but which have always informed my view of him, and one of those things Mick – you’ve over a long period of time, you’ve actively demonstrated an interest in the environment. It’s actually something you’re passionate about. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Martin, I’m very passionate about it because I am a firm believer that we own none of it but we are there for our … and now that I’m a grandfather I understand what I was saying ten, fifteen, twenty years ago, thirty years ago, that we are custodians only, for a brief period of time. It’s like getting on the carousel. You get off, that thing keeps running around and while it keeps going around, and we’re off it, or when we’re on it, we’ve got to operate and do something about things. But more importantly, I suppose the love of the environment came about … there’s so many words that I find out now in modern football and modern life, uni life, that I didn’t think of the word when things happened. You just had things happening around you, and I’m talking about mentoring. I wouldn’t have known what the word, the term, meant, when I was at a very young age.  My father was … very briefly … my father was abandoned at birth and he was taken in by his maternal grandmother, who remarried, and when she remarried, he wasn’t accepted in that house, so he was pushed from pillar to post, built a very strong character. On the other side, my mother came from … my grandmother was German Lutheran and my grandfather was Roman Catholic Irishman, so when they … and they lived on direct opposite sides of the road in Gordon, a little town just up the road here, it’s about an hour and a half away from here, but that road used to wind through Gordon. When they married, I don’t think things were too good, a German would marry an Irishman, particularly if one was Lutheran and the other one was Catholic. So she was born to that very loving family, a very poor family, but loving. And so my father and mother got together and created two kids, and we went through life, what I thought was then a fantastic life. We first of all lived in a one room place, and then we moved into the Commission home, which was … my daughter’s writing a book at the moment, called *Malthouse – a Life in Footy* … it’s through her eyes, and she said, dad, it wasn’t Wendouree West, it was called Ballarat Common, and then it became Wendouree West. And I think Wendouree’s a little bit Toorak-y and when they sort of tacked on Wendouree West, they were less than impressed that Ballarat Common became Wendouree West.  But even that, there’s some stories through that, that just gave me a sense of … along the line that we were a little bit different, but not necessarily different. I really still couldn’t work out the differences, but I spent a lot of time out at Gordon, with my grandparents, and then my father contacted a disease when I was 12 and it paralysed him, totally, so therefore I lived in and out of Ballarat, and my grandmother died at the same time, so I lived with my grandfather and my mother and back and forth, and he taught me a lot about the bush. And he taught me the greatest value about the bush – that he, these are the memories – rose coloured glasses, admittedly, but an old house, I think it was an 1880s house we lived in. I can still remember seeing that big fire, and a big kettle used to hang from it and without the wood, we couldn’t survive, and we used to have what was called a tub, on Saturday nights. And the tub was a tub. A big hot water thing was poured in there and the next morning we went to mass and that was, believe it or not, your only wash that you had all week – the only bath you had all week, you used to wash. And it was just that the bush supplied that to you. And I remember going up the back, and dragging back some old logs, and we’d just saw them up between – he used to carry the saw of course and I’d be on the other end, as a little kid. And he taught me a lot about it. He refused to have a gun, and yet we used to lose that many chickens to the fox, so the chickens ended up being in the cypress tree, along with our Coolgardie safe, so we used to have the meat hang from there, the dead meat hang from there, and we’d have the live meat next to it.  And just little things, little things come back. Like, even to the fact that one of the traps he set for the fox took the leg off one of the chooks. There was no way known he was going to kill that chook, so we had Hoppy, until she stopped laying eggs, and then she became a chicken stew. So, those sort of things. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| I remember when you were at West Coast, you got involved in a debate over a forest down at southern Western Australia, and I think the loggers actually came and blockaded West Coast’s training. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Oh, it was a little bit more than just a debate. I got involved in old growth forests, and I don’t even know to this day, but I can probably say it now, because the man is out of office and a brilliant person, in Richard Court. He was actually frequenting my place under the cover of darkness, to see whether he could broker a deal with the conservation groups, not one. I belonged to none of them. I didn’t want to align myself to one, and not another, just to see if we can get some balance about the old growth forests. In that process, we actually saved 250,000 hectares. The government bought out one slice, which was 125,000 hectares, and another one was broke, so the contra deal was OK, we’ll forget the money, not we, but the government would take over that particular forest and that was declared national park. So there’s 250,000 hectares. But we kept that pressure on Wilson Tuckey, who tried to do a job on me and tell me how good the government were going to be and don’t worry about the trees, because they’ll re-grow. And I said what about the old ones, with the cockatoos and that … he said, the cockatoos don’t use the old growth forests. I said, well, where do they lay their eggs, Wilson? And he said, well, they must lay them somewhere. I said, yes, clearly in the old growth forests. And you’re going to chop it down. So we had a running blue with the Minister of Forestry in those days.  So, yes, it was quite … |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| But the loggers … |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Yeah, they did. They blocked us off at Subiaco Oval. Knocked out all our fax machines, because they inundated that with faxes from Eden, which is a very strong forestry area, Tasmania. And of course they just whacked it in to the point where the club just said, they distanced themselves from me. And they said, no more. Concentrate on coaching. For one day. Until then, all the others started to come through saying, well, about time someone stood up for it. Then the club said, oh, no, we’re right behind him. So it went the full circle. And when the cheques started to arrive from people saying, we’ve got no idea about football, but we want to become a member of the West Coast because we support him, I become even more important. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| Well, the other thing that has always, I’ve always noticed about you, is that you’ve had good relationships with indigenous players, and I remember we had a discussion years ago, in Perth, and you were telling me that when the Eagles went out into the bush, to remote Aboriginal communities, you’d be invited to sit with the elders. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Well, that took place. It probably developed really when I was playing football in Ballarat. One of my arch enemies become a very good friend of mine, in Robbie Muir, Eric Clarke. Eric Clarke, you’d probably raise your eyebrows in terms of who he is, but certainly Robbie did, he was one eighth Aboriginal. And so I got to know those families very well, and I understood why they were so, so angry at times, about certain things that took place.  But when I went to Western Australia, I was invited to do a lot of documentaries. And one of them stands out. It was at Warburton. And Warburton is a little place on the border of Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory, so you can just visualise where that was, and it’s … they use amgas because unfortunately a lot of the communities use petrol for sniffing, so this was just amgas, I’ve never smelt am gas but apparently it doesn’t give you any sort of high whatsoever, so that was handy. And we flew in, on this small plane and I was there to umpire a match. Someone had forgot the footy. I thought they’ve forgotten to tell the other side to turn up, but right on cue, a few vans come along and the mattress in the back, with ten-odd people, and they’d jump out, put their gear on – no – some had boots, most didn’t, and they’d play a game of football. And I had a chance then to sit by this dry river, or creek bed, with about four or five elders. And it was just probably one of the most amazing periods of my life, was that particular afternoon. It was being filmed by a young man who had filmed a lot of documentaries in the past, and we sat around this creek, and one of them said, as a kid I used to swing off that tree and have a swim. And it was as dry as … you couldn’t imagine it ever having water in it. And the other elders just nodded. Until the river snake got captured by the community down the road, and the water dried up. And I thought they were having a lend of me. I thought, am I supposed to break out into a laugh here, or whatever. And the others were going, no, that’s what took place. And I thought, well, this is serious because they’re telling me something that they probably haven’t told too many people, about this river snake. And the reason why the river snake came along and was captured, was because one of their boys headed off with one of the girls, from the other community. And that was … they took something special. They took that snake away, which took the water away.  And with that, I saw this scar on this elder’s leg. And he was … he’d have to be in his seventies I dare say, probably early eighties. And I said, what happened? And he said, he also headed off with one of the girls down the road, or wanted to take one of the girls as his wife, and he had to take the penalty. And the penalty was being speared. So they stood x amount of metres away, and just threw a spear through him and it went through his thigh, didn’t hit the bone, and come out the other side. And it bled like anything, so he was telling me. And I said, what sort of treatment did you get, and he said, well, I had to walk to Kalgoorlie. And Kalgoorlie is days away, literally days away. And that’s the scar, on both sides of his leg, where the spear went through, and that was his penalty. But he actually was telling me all this. And it was, people around me were saying, you’re special, because they don’t discuss those details with you.  But I was so privileged, because a measure of a man’s importance is the length of the spear they give you. And the light plane, we had to poke it in one end of the plane, right through the other, and even now, I can only fit it in my basement, because I can’t get it into my house. It’s special to me. And the women gave me this plate that they’d made at the Warburton Station. So I love the Aboriginal culture. I think unfortunately the elders are not being given enough responsibility so the youth aren’t taking notice of them, and the youth are running off in their own way. But, the very strong communities, where the elders are respected, it’s a fantastic community to be involved in.  And we’ve got to also remember in Western Australia, outside of the different, what do they say? The clans if you like, there’s the central Aboriginal is one that’s been genetically engineered over forty, fifty thousand years of trapping kangaroos, going a long way for it, very skinny, dried-up skin, because of this being in the sun for so long, whereas the coastal Aboriginal is very much mixed with Malay, and you’ve got the beautiful soft skin, and they live primarily on the dugong and the turtles. So you’ve got two different, real different cultures of the Aboriginals, but they’ve both got, they’re really strong and loving, and very family orientated. And if I can just digress a little bit, we are white man think every time that Nicky Winmar got a new contract, and we’d flippantly say, oh he won’t have a cent at the end of it. That’s right. Because when you go out and you kill a kangaroo, that’s shared. And yet we are … who’s the selfish one? Us, or them? We wouldn’t dream of sharing it. And yet, they share everything. So why not share the contract as well? |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| Chris Lewis is a footballer who I think is really interesting in the history of the game, and I often think of him as the last pre-Mabo footballer, he was the last bloke who really copped full bore racism on the footy field. You wrote a great column in *The Australian* many years ago, saying that you felt no apology could ever make up to Chris Lewis what was taken away from him. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| No, no, because we are so flippant in saying, oh, we’re sorry, and get over it. The longer you’re with these people, who have been subjected to that sort of stuff, the more you learn about how difficult it is for them. They will smile, I’m talking about the Aboriginal boys, they’ll smile and put up with it, because we think, I’m talking white man here, it’s a generalism, nothing of it. Until you get hit with something, and then you feel offended. These people feel bitterly offended by things that they don’t complain about, but now fortunately I think, people are starting to stand up for their own rights, and getting some response, and Chris Lewis – you’re right. Chris Lewis, if I had to say there was someone who started off that naïve, and is now that bitter, he would be the one that would be the closest to it.  He was raised and … one of the lucky kids who went to Christchurch, I think, School, because of his talent. Beautiful looking kid and as he come through, he was starting to get subjected to the taunts because AFL football and he’s black, and then it was happening on the field. He was suspended for biting. He was suspended for spitting. He was suspended for hitting. We don’t tolerate it. And yet, when we look back now, and what took place for him to have those actions, it’s criminal that he was ever suspended. It was criminal that people got away with what they got away with. We’ve learnt something about it. We’re trying to do something about it. But I don’t know whether Chris ever got over it, I’ll find out tomorrow. I’ve got a … I rarely go back to reunions, but I’m going back to the twentieth anniversary of our premiership, and Chris was fundamental to that win. So I will see him tomorrow and hopefully I’ll see a young … a man who has grown through it, and can come out the other side and love life again. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| When you went to Collingwood, Collingwood at that stage did have a bad reputation on the issue of race, and you and Eddie and Nathan Buckley, it seemed to me that you actually reversed the culture at the club. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Well, I don’t … I’m not going to talk whether Eddie or Bucks said that thing, but the simple fact is I looked at every man as a footballer, not what he was, not what colour he is, what creed, what religion, whatever the case may be, I looked at them as that. And when I interviewed Leon Davis at a training camp, and he couldn’t look you in the eye, he had his hoodie on, he had a cold, didn’t want to be there, but knew he had to be there, because he was told by his mum and dad, get there, otherwise you won’t be picked. He just didn’t want to be there. But that is so much about a young kid that was shy, to go to Perth, he come from Northern, and to go to Perth was big. Yet to come to Melbourne or to go to Canberra was massive, in front of all these people that are looking at you, and probing you and finding out what sort of personality you’ve got. Leon just needed someone to say, relax. Don’t worry about it. Do you want to play football? Can we help you play football? And I think if you invite someone in, you’ve got to give them the courtesy of … that invitation means that you’ve invited him in, you allow him to sit in your seat, they’re allowed to eat your food, they’re allowed to live in your house, regardless of whatever. And Collingwood had to, it was a depressing place for the Aboriginal boys, there’s no question. They’d come in there and then open up, and then be able to keep recruiting players who had talent and just happened to be Aboriginal – it didn’t matter. Bring people in, bring players in, and let them be what they are.  I think you’ve also … you’ve got to be very mindful that there is a massively different culture, and with Chris, the word walkabout, I’ll use that word, I could tell with Chris that he needed space. And I’d say to him, walkabout Lewie? And he’d go, yeah, I need some time. I’d say, right, I will see you at half past five, Friday night for a 7.30 game. And I know the match committee would get nervous, they’d look at their clock, he’s not here, he’s not here. He’d walk in, 5.30, get dressed, and that was it. So, it’s a realisation that we’re not all the same. That we have got different needs. I send my players off from time to time, whether it be Daisy Thomas, whether it be Harry O’Brien, whether it be Leon Davis – I don’t want to see you for a couple of days. Just relax. Go and … Daisy, go and do some surfing. Just freshen your mind up. Harry, go to Daylesford and you know, just go to the restaurants and just relax. Scottie Pendlebury, just work with your mum’s tuck shop, whatever it was he was doing. And Leon, I’d say, just spend some time with your kids. And what you’d end up getting was a fresh player.  So, the needs of one, aren’t always the needs of the others. But you’ve got to be flexible enough and tolerant enough, to understand … Rob Muir’s a classical case. If he had have known his autonomy a little bit better than what he did, or anatomy rather, better, he wouldn’t be with us. He shot himself because a couple of blokes did something they shouldn’t have done to him, through here, this is where his heart is. And the bullet bounced off the back of his arm. But if he had thought where his heart was, where his heart really was, he probably would be dead. So, you get to know these … and he shot himself because something happened that shouldn’t have happened. If they had have understood his culture. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| One of the things about you as a coach that stands out for me, is that you were always able to get your teams up and some coaches struggle to get their teams up two weeks in a row, but over twenty-odd years, your teams always seem to keep coming up. What’s that about? How do you keep getting people … |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Well, I don’t know, really, outside of the fact that what I’d like to think I do know, is that I know the person. As distinct from the player. I’ve done a lot of work with players in little groups, and just probe, to find out what makes people tick. And I don’t think this is necessarily just built for sport. I think this is in general. Whether it be teacher/pupil, whether it be boss and employee, one of the things that regularly took place was that I would have say, four, five or six, come home for dinner, or we’d take them on a little mini camp or whatever, and I’ll give you some examples. As recently as this year, so it’s not even an AFL club, this is a NRL club, and I had the assistant leaders, or when I say that, the emerging leaders if you like, and we had them together and I said, tell me about yourself. Tell me about your family. And it went around, and you can just see the other players thinking, oh, I didn’t know that about that bloke. But what it does, it sets the stage for you to be able to know what buttons to press, and also that we’re all in it together. And this big front rower got up and made this remark, or statement, and he was crying his eyes out, and looked around, and everyone else was. And since I’ve been watching those games, and the interaction between those players and that young man, is astounding. They’ve learned something about him, big tough front rower, and it’s changed the complexity of that side, or that particular group. And I’ve worked on that theory all the way through. That we’re all so unique that we don’t … like there’s certain players that I would never berate in front of another group, but there’s others that are whipping boys. I’d give them what-oh, don’t worry. And they would respond. Whereas another player, no. Out the back, just talk about it, go through it, and he’d respond differently. But they’ve got to want to play for you. They’ve got to have the respect, and you can’t demand respect. Respect is actually grown, and I’ve copped some whackings, so don’t worry, don’t think I’m immune to getting some bad losses, but by and large I think players want to play. They’ll be disappointed if they don’t perform for you, and that’s so important. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| Nowadays, we’re getting this move towards sports science and people are starting to look at the game scientifically and I know I have reservations about that. But what’s your view on making the game scientific and making discussions of it abstract? What do you … |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| I think we can’t ignore the fact that the athletes of today are getting bigger, stronger, quicker, and they’re smarter. And I say they’re smarter because they want to know more about the game and structure. The game of yesteryear … put it this way, one of the great coaches I’ve ever had … I’m fortunate to have had some of the great coaches. And they’re winners. And I believe that winning rubs off. So, to have Alan Jeans, but with Alan Jeans, going right back into the early ‘70s, as much as he was a bloke that everyone said, ooh … I know at Hawthorn he changed, because everyone changes. You know more about the game than what you did earlier. I ran down the race at North Melbourne, and in front of me was a bloke named John Manzie, and he was four or five years older than me, and he turned to me as we were running down the race, and he said, oh, by the way, you’ve got Keith Greig today, and I’ve gone OK, I’ve got Keith Greig. Keith Greig incidentally, won two Brownlows. I won them for him. [laughs] But why wouldn’t the coach tell me that? Because that wasn’t the thing you discussed in there. It was more rah, rah, rah and get into it. Now Alan Jeans would change as time went on. But I look now and think, the strategy of the game is so important. And what you’ve got to do with strategies, and I’ll come back to that science thing, is that you’ve got to get people to own in. And then they own it, they’ll go out there and have that ownership, and they don’t want to let go, but if they don’t own it, they’re a bit flippant. Science … the science of football today is … I want to be … basically players don’t understand this, but they … and I fortunately, when I’ve lectured here, and I don’t say that too often, that I lecture here, but bio-science, the physio is coming through and I say to them, if you’re going to go to a sports club, be ready for selfishness that you’ve never believed possible. And players would never think they’re selfish, but they are, because they would go to a physio, I’ve got a hamstring. And they want your undivided attention, and they want to be back in two, not three weeks. Because it’s costing them money, and it’s costing them a game. And they will bang on your door, they don’t care whether there’s someone else injured. They want that time. So what we do with science, at the moment, is, we give them that opportunity. Altitude room – we can make you stronger, at sea level. We can make you run quicker, through the structures that we have in place with this particular machine. We will test your bloods, the bloods come through to me, they come through the scientist, he comes through to me and he says, well, I wouldn’t be running this bloke flat out today, because the probability is he will break down, he needs to read at 80%. So I adjust my training technique to fit into that science level, so that player, by the end of the week, is ready to play football. Not for me to feel comfortable – for him to feel comfortable. So when he steps all that field, where all the bits and pieces that we’ve put together, help him mentally go, I am now ready to play.  Whereas yesteryear, you lose a game of football, you used to dread Tuesday night’s training. Because you’d be belted and you’d be expected to come up again on the Friday, or under Tommy’s system, Thursday night, belted again, and then play on the Saturday. So I wore out pretty quickly under Tommy. And he was a great coach.  But science has got a place, because if you don’t do it, someone else is. And let me tell you, the response from the Director of Science and from what they can give you, is a percentage advantage. So you either give it to the opposition, or you go past it. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| Yeah, but, it still comes back to man management. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Oh, yeah. The game is, I think one of the criticisms … if I had to say, all my advice to these young coaches that are out there at the moment. There’s six out there that have either been my coaches, or assistant coaches or player. Simplify things. Don’t make it so that the player is still spinning in his head as he goes down that race. Simplicity is the best form because you’ve cut everything down to its most simple form, and go, right, this is the act that you have to perform. Know your role and play your role. And you’ve just got to know that some players, Pendlebury, you could almost tell him anything and he will get hold of it, and it will spin around, and he’ll just work at it. Players that don’t talk off the ground feel very comfortable talking on the ground, because they know what they’re talking about, and one of them is a kid, a young kid called Brad Dick. He wouldn’t say anything off the ground. He gets on the ground and he’s directing senior players, because I’ve said to him, Brad, you’ve got to make sure the system’s set up. He’s unbelievable. You get a bloke like … this is on camera, some of the taller players, I won’t say their names, you say to them, see ball, punch ball. Ball in hand, kick ball. See the boundary line, your friend. And if you want to complicate it any further by saying, every now and again swivel your head, just to see what’s around you, you’ve confused him straight away. [laughter]  The simple theory on blokes that are six foot four and a half to six foot five and above, very slow to get there. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| So, with the game becoming more and more scientific, what would the chances of an illiterate person playing the game at the top level be now, given that once upon a time, illiteracy was no barrier to a career in AFL/VFL. How is it now? |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Well, that’s fair enough to say, because quite frankly when you had the messages were never … really, when I think back over my time, they were never written. There was just the blackboard, well if the blackboard was even there. Brad Dick, he’ll freely … he’s OK with this, Brad arrived and any new messages, because you’d have your assistant coaches put up about the structures and so forth, or even team rules, Brad just couldn’t read it. He couldn’t read or write. Our first priority was to get him into a school that gave him the opportunity to be able to read basic reading, and writing. Which he did. Which we’re that delighted in. That was a massive accomplishment as far as we’re concerned. And he felt so comfortable. There was another couple of players, and I won’t mention them, because one’s still playing and one’s just out of playing, he’s got a brother who’s playing – they struggled. One in particular a few years ago, he really struggled and didn’t say a lot, and really took things on and just guessed it. But it had become very evident that he wasn’t getting it and he no longer plays, but I felt for him, because I’m not a note taker. I don’t take notes into a meeting, or rarely take notes into a meeting, because I just think that sometimes these things have got to be … you saturate the player all week with strategies, he just needs a little bit of space, a little bit of time, there it is, up there on … you know, the assistant coaches might put their message up on the wall, that reflects what you want anyway, let’s minimise it, bring it back, in fact I’ll digress, but we, us, Collingwood at the time, we’ve gone from that rah, rah, rah, build up your heart rate, go out there, do a warm-up, it goes up any further, then you’re expected to play football. We actually worked the other way, where we meditate before we go out, then lower the heart rate, bring it back up for the warm up, and then you’re ready to play.  So, things change so dramatically and going to those players, knowing your role and playing your role in today’s football is quite elaborate, so therefore if a kid can’t read or write, there’s other methodologies. You’ve got to show, you’ve got to pick up and you’ve got to find out about these kids. What does work for some, and what does work for others. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| Why is Dane Swan such a good footballer, and why can’t other teams mark him? |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Um, well he’s an accumulator for a start. He just gets where the ball is. He’s very, very powerful through the midriff. He’s got a very strong core. Rarely goes to ground, and he’s a one touch player. So when you’re one touch, in close, you go in to attract the football. Two, he’s got a great belief in himself. Absolutely great belief in his own abilities, he believes he’s the best player in the competition. He doesn’t say it, but he believes it. And he’s got every right to thing that. He’s the reigning Brownlow medallist, he’s won three best and fairests at Collingwood, he’s won one in a premiership year, he’s a premiership player, he’s an All-Australian. I took him into Ireland, he won the medal, over in Ireland. Hardly touched the football before he got over there. He’s naturally gifted in finding the ball, knows where it is. He’s fantastically quick. On the training track, if people watched him on the training track, they’d go, well, he’s half hearted. No. We have a structure, that I had with him, that your most important day is match day. We’d feed back from that and go, OK, what do you need to do for maintenance? Now, in the altitude room, he’d go in there and he would work hard in there, as hard as anyone, I won’t say harder than anyone, because Pendlebury would go in there too, and they would work for at least two occasions, on a seven day break, and he would saturate himself in there. So he would do a lot of work behind closed doors that he knew would take him just beyond most opponents. So when it got down to a six or seven minute period, and someone had to go with him, they no longer go with him now, he would come off, and we’d … science again … work on the theory, six and a half on, one and a half off, six and a half on, one and a half off. By the third one, that player could not go with him at all. So by the time he’d entered into the second, or third and fourth quarters, disruption. That’s all we wanted to do. Just plain Erwin Rommel’s quote, “no plan survives contact”. And that’s the best theory we had for him. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| Of all the players you’ve coached, who’s one who stands out in your mind, just interests you as a footballer? As a player? If you had to name one. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| That’s a pretty difficult … I’ve coached probably 400 players … well, I’ll give you one from each club. Dougie Hawkins. Just couldn’t tell you why. I’d go Dougie, that was outstanding. How did you do that? I dunno Mick. We used to have a kangaroo court, so to speak, on Monday night, just to break up the week, you know, this big game on Saturday, a bit of recovery on Sunday, and light training on Monday and we’d go across to the hotel and just have a counter meal, no grog of course. And he always volunteered to be the banister, not the barrister, he wanted to be the banister. I said to him, Doug, one day, I said, Doug, your feet, they’re shocking. I said, look at your toes. He said, I know, I’ve booked into the footologist, I’m going there this week. Nothing changed with Doug, that’s Doug. But a beautiful kick, just wrecked by a knee, he’s probably the best footballer I’ve coached.  The second one would have been, I could name a multitude at West Coast because I very strong bonded with Guy McKenna, John Worsfold, I loved little Tony Evans, but I’ve got to say Glen Jakovich, because his father died at 15. I reckon by the age of eight or nineteen, his mum said, oh, she loaded me up with a thing that I don’t know that I really wanted. It was, you’re like a father to him. And I thought, well, I’ve got four kids. I don’t know whether I want a Glen Jakovich as well. But you’d knock on the door, I’d go to the front door and there’d be an undersized cray left on my … because he’d go out cray fishing and he’d only leave me the undersized ones. And you’d think, well, it’s dead. I can’t very well throw it back. So we’d cook it up. He’s unique. I took him over to Ireland as an assistant coach, and Glen is one of those blokes – I’m sure he doesn’t mind me saying this, because I really love him, he’s just a beautiful kid, but again, he’s just short of that six foot four and a half. And we stood out at Croke Park, and for those that don’t know Croke Park, it’s like the MCG in Dublin. And it’s a 60,000 seat stadium, but at one end, there’s just green grass. It’s grass at one end. That’s where the English came in with their tanks and sprayed the crowd plus the players in 1916, I think it was, and they said they would never build on spilt Irish blood. And we’re standing out in the middle. I’ve been told this by the President, as we’re just about to start this match. I’m thinking, we’re in real trouble here. The national anthem and they took it just beyond what you could believe with this national anthem, and our boys, we’re playing our national anthem and it was just … it’s probably one of my greatest joys in football, to be involved in that series. Because we’re taking the Irish on, we’re never expected to win. We won the first Test in Limerick, we’re playing the second Test and Glen turns to me, just as the national anthem is just about to finish, and he said, it makes the hair on your shoulders stand up. [laughter] I said, well, Glen, it makes the hair on the back of my neck stand up really. And he said, oh, yeah, probably that too.  But we went for a steak after the game, we won the game, and we went for a steak, and Glen wants to be just a little bit different. He wants to be … he’s born wherever it was, south of Fremantle, so you know, let’s not get too caught up in your upbringing, he should have stuck with that. Everyone ordered their steak and he said, I’ll have the boz steak. And the waitress said, boz steak sir? He said, yeah, I’ll have the boz steak. And we’ve all gone, boz steak. We didn’t see the boz steak. What’s this boz steak? It must be OK for Glen to order it. And she said, oh, you mean the 8 ounce … Yeah, says Glen. That’s Glen. That’s what you get. That lovable sort of touching on six foot four and a half, six foot five. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| And Collingwood? |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Yeah, Collingwood, a multitude. You know, I really … there’s so many people there I really enjoy. But I reckon … well Harry touches there, and Daisy and Penders and Jimmy Clement. Anthony Rocca was outstanding. But I reckon Paul Licuria is probably as good as I’ve seen as a person. And that’s being unfair to a lot of others, because a lot of them are brilliant there. But Paul had this wonderful gift of just caring and listening and would never say no, and yet a fierce, fierce competitor. And the tragedy of it is that he never played in the premiership. Twice ACLs. One at 17, one at 21. That normally would finish you. And to tell him to retire, was one of the hardest things I’ve ever done. Because I didn’t want to play him in the seconds, and he was going to play seconds. So it’s very difficult. But we get on so well.  There’s three. But there’s a multitude … I could multiply it by ten and still have other people. Because they’re just wonderful people, really. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| One story, about you, that I won’t forget is that … I’ve been involved with the Melbourne footy club over the past three or four years. I got involved when Jimmy was still with us, and the whole Liam Jurrah story, which I think is a fantastic sports story by world standards, but of course this year it all went awfully badly for them. And they took a thumping in Sydney I think, from Sydney, over a hundred and something points, and it really did look … it looked like they were in a terrible situation and terrible, not just in the fact that they might not even be competitive, but that they might slide back into debt and all Jimmy’s work would be for nothing. It was a very bleak time, and I know a lot of people in Melbourne, I was really feeling for them. And you made a statement in the paper, you said that if you were coaching, you’d get all the players and all the people in the club and sit them in a circle and you’d ask the question, what is it that we love about this game? That’s how you’d re-energise it. And I just thought that was a fantastic story. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Well, we do it for a reason, and it’s not the money, and it’s not necessarily the glory – it’s … I spoke to a school today and I said to the kids, you’ve got a unique opportunity … from when I was eight, I joined a club. For Wendouree West. At 58, I was clubless. And didn’t know what anyone meant when they said, players would come back and they’d say to me, Licuria in particular, him and Jimmy Clement, a very bright man, Jimmy Clement, and said, we don’t want to come in any more, we don’t feel part of it. I said, don’t be ridiculous. You’re both two-time Copeland trophy winners. You’ve got every right to be part of it. No, we just don’t feel right. And that October day when I left Collingwood, I was clubless. And it was the first time I felt almost abandoned, where you think … outside of the family, the family are very strong. But when do you now share a victory? When things go bad, who do you lean on? Club life is, regardless of whether you’re a club that hasn’t won a game in five years, to one that’s been at the top, it’s about sharing. And I think that we look at … I still remember this story, and I was 17 years of age, or 18 years of age, sorry I would have been 17. It was the year before I came down to Melbourne. And this story is like this. As we all know, in country football, in country life, you need a football club and a netball club. And that keeps you together. Because you make your cakes, and you have your lemons and you have a beer after it, and it brings the crowd … it brings the little town together. And this story was told to me by a former player, and he said, what does football really mean to you? And he said, I’ll tell you what it means to me. He said, there’s a story about a young bloke who played … lived in the town. And when you live in a town, you don’t play for anyone else. God knows, if you don’t get a game, you become President or you become Treasurer, or you become an orange boy or … you’ve got to be someone. You cannot leave that town.  Small town. And he’s 21, 22 years of age, and he’s just getting his strength together for a big season, and the round 3 come along and the coach said to him … oh, first of all, he’s come outside the rooms, I’ve got to get this story right, and his car’s gone. Someone’s pinched his car, so he’s not happy. Not, not happy at all. Brand new car. Country centre. Who would steal his car? So he’s walking home and looks across the road, and there’s his girlfriend, arm in arm with his best mate. Well, anger. He can’t believe the anger. And he emotionally thinks, what’s going on here? And he gets home, and the phone rings. And the coach says to him, oh look, we’ve had a match committee, you’re not playing, you’re in the seconds. And he cried.  Now, doesn’t that sum up football? And that’s why every now and then you’ve got to check reality. What’s it mean to you? What does life and what does the life that you’re living mean to you? And if that young kid lost his brand new car, he sees his girlfriend off with his best mate, but he gets told, round 3, you’ve been dropped. And that had the most devastating effect.  So when you’re at a football club, I don’t think people can understand what it’s like. And I call it “it”. I did a story on “it” and I know I upset a lot of journos when I wrote this story, Mike Sheehan and a couple of others were really offended by it. “It” is something that Matthew Primus could only understand at this stage. I think people in Australia will lose their job and have lost their jobs in the last few months, but never publicly. He’s lost his job. Publicly. And it’s the torment of having that pressure of trying to win games of football, knowing that your family’s out behind you, knowing that every time your kids go to school, they’re getting shit bagged, you know, getting told, your father can’t coach. This, you know, and he’s desperate … whether he’s a good coach or a bad coach, he wants it to happen. He’s thrown his heart and his soul into it and he’s been publicly sacked. And I think, that is “it”. It’s the “it” when 100,000 people look at you and yell out to Rhyce Shaw, that’s why I let Rhyce Shaw go to Sydney, you’re a coward. Coward. God, the game is so tough these days, and yet to select one particular player and say he’s a coward, and then remind him so often. That’s why I let him go. That’s why I let him go to Sydney. He needed a new start, that you’ve got to sometimes take yourself away from that situation. He’s good for our football club, but what’s good for him?  And by sitting around a circle, sometimes a few things start to come out and you can start to say, what does it mean to me? And football should mean everything to you, take the family situation out. If it doesn’t mean everything to you, get up and walk out. Because that’s the stakes. In sport. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| All right. We’re going to throw it open. Does anyone want to ask questions? Are there questions from the floor. |
| **Questioner** |
| Yeah, Mick when are you going to come and coach at Richmond? |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| No, I’m employed here. You’d better ask the Vice-Chancellor. Not the Vice-Chancellor’s Fellow, the Vice-Chancellor. A three year contract with La Trobe. |
| **Questioner** |
| Have you ever been close? |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| To coaching Richmond? Oh very close. I was close to Richmond when I first … contrary to popular belief, when I left West Coast I actually went to them and said, look I’ve got to leave here, again very briefly, Nanette’s mother was dying, my father was very unwell, I wanted my two boys’ final education to be in Victoria, because I knew if they stayed at uni in Western Australia they would want to live there, like my girls, and that would be it. Stuck, not stuck in Western Australia, but you limit your opportunities. So the club said, no, your contract, you can’t coach. And I said, well, that’s OK. I’ve just got to go home anyway. And so contrary to what Eddie and all those would like to believe that I would sign with Collingwood, I hadn’t. And I looked at Richmond, and … sorry, after I got back the club rang and said, listen, you’ve had ten years. You go for it. So my manager spoke to Richmond, Hawthorn, Adelaide and Collingwood. Adelaide’s hardly close to Melbourne, in terms of a drive. So I needed to look at somewhere that had a vision, and someone that had something tangible, to say … like I knew Collingwood were 16th and I knew Richmond weren’t much better. That didn’t worry me, where they were, it was more where we could be. I like management to have a five year macro if you like, coach. You get appointed coach, you coach them. And I couldn’t see myself coaching them, at Richmond, because they didn’t have any goals, they didn’t have any aims, they were a bit all over the shop, whereas Collingwood at least said, this is what we want to be, in terms of Olympic Park, and it’s a membership base that was so low that it could go to there, and I knew that. So, that’s how close I was to Richmond.  Our director of science is a classical case. Director of science. Collingwood’s got the best director of science in Australia. He came out of the Olympics, no job, because he’d finished with the rowing, rowing, sailing and whatever else he was in charge of. The fitness side of things. Was interviewed by Richmond, interviewed by Collingwood straight after, interviewed by Richmond when the interviewer said to him, oh, you’ve played here? And he said, yes I’ve played … I’ve been at Richmond two or three years and I played one game. Oh, did you? And who was the coach? And he said, you were. That’s why … I interviewed him next and he come to Collingwood. |
| **Questioner** |
| Yeah, Mick, I’m a Sydney supporter. Now, Sydney supporters admire you more than any other coach in the league because for the last eight years, when we play Collingwood, ten minutes into the game, we saw Collingwood really has control and they’re playing much better than they did the week before. So, there’s something about Sydney that you’ve analysed and am I right that you do a lot of analysis on other clubs, and you can pick some chink in the style, or the amour. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Well, predictability’s very good. It works in your thing. Sydney were and still are, very predictable, because they’ve still got a run-off on that type of coach, it doesn’t mean it’s wrong. It simply means it’s, to me, when you’ve got that predictability and you’re able to measure off … I always look at two things. I look at the coach, my job’s to look at the coach, analyse the coach. If you coach there long enough, the players will reflect your image, in many respects. So I looked at that. So I know what – I saw Sydney as Paul Roos. I saw Paul as a player, I thought I knew how he was going to play. Secondly, their predictability … you look at their strengths, you look at their weaknesses. And it’s a fine edge. It’s a real fine edge. It’s like a batsman. I always use Damien Martin as an example. I know he’s now not playing test cricket, but his greatest shot was the cut shot. You know where you pick him up? Every time in gully, because he never got over the top of it. But yet he’d whip a dozen through you before you caught him, but you did catch him there. So I always looked at Sydney and thought, OK, I know their process, because this is their process in getting the ball in the front fifty, this is taking it out of the back fifty. So we worked on, how do we stop both happening, so they link in. And we were able to do that successfully, as you know, for the last ten times.  They’ve changed their structure a little bit. They’re a bit quicker around the outside, but you can only be quicker around the outside if you can get the ball from the inside, outside. So, that’s what you need to address. That’s what Collingwood have to address this weekend, which I think they probably could. Also, that ground is a little bit – you’ve got to take the ground into consideration as well. So there’s a lot of things that have got to come together, but again, I reiterate this – know your role and play your role. So I always say to the player group is, your role on this particular day is to play *that* role, know it and play it and we are halfway home. |
| **Questioner** |
| Mick, I was just curious about your view of the modern football media. And even indeed the sports media in Australia, particularly maybe in the light of the Olympic Games and the response to Australia’s performance. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Well, I’ve got a journalist in the family. She doesn’t … she’s living with us these next … this last two weeks while they’re painting the house. It’s been fantastic having her and her husband and two kids. It’s been a revelation of … they’re outstanding. Let me tell you, I sleep very soundly at night. With two grandchildren running around after me. She regularly reminds me that what she was taught at uni was this – that you’re a journalist. The facts, get those right. Report what you see. If you write an opinion piece, make sure it’s an opinion piece and not mixed up with the others, but don’t … let the story be about … don’t *be* the story. And the way I see it at this stage, there’s a lot of journos that I’ve … all of a sudden they’re finding out that they believe they’re experts, because now they’re on TV and radio, and they get asked by players or coaches what do they think about something that happened on the field. The player and the coach knows exactly what took place. Then you hear what the outcome is, from the journo, and you realise how far and how distant they are from the reality of the game. But you wouldn’t say anything to them, because that’s … but they think that they’re right. And I just don’t get that. To me, there are so many good stories out there.  One of the great things about reading … I’m not over the Yanks, in fact I can live without them, but one of the great things about some of their sporting stories, in depth, beautifully done. You finish and you come away and you know that person they’re talking about almost you feel as if you’ve been part of that interview. Outstanding. But we don’t have enough of that in Australia. We don’t know the … we don’t … we’ve got a pretty insular game. But we don’t know the individuals that play it, we know of them, we know more about the journos. They’ve got an opinion about them, and that really to me is frustrating, because there is … if I’m going to last with Channel 7, one of the things that I’ve asked them to do, and I started, I had started doing, is interviews. I like to do really in depth interviews. I’m doing surface interviews at the moment, but I had one with Scott Watters on the weekend, and I was really pleased the way it came out. It showed Scott Watters as a father, as a coach, and as a worrier. Because, you’ve probed for the questions, and have a relaxed atmosphere, and the last thing I said to the producer, last interview ever if you burn him. Because I don’t think my job is to burn people. It’s to show people what these people are made of.  And that’s what I think the Australian public is screaming out for. And the opinion of second place is not good enough, it could be a fingernail between first and second, a fingernail between third and not getting a medal, fifth. They go over there not to train, not to work out hard, yes, everyone is different. I say to the school groups, and other groups that I talk to here, what’s the hardest thing to do? Be Roger Federer. Or be Manchester United. What’s the hardest? And I’m so … I can’t believe the response. People say, oh, it’s harder to be one or the other and it’s almost fifty/fifty. It’s harder to be Man U. Because it’s got far more moving parts. And yet, you know, we talk about the Olympics, because the best of the best in the world. And we have sadly got two, I think it’s just a reflection of where we are at the moment. Maybe we have a dip, but praise the ones that are working, praise the ones that have a crack at it. And you know, you sort out the blokes that give up too easily. So I get disappointed, I get disappointed because I sometimes … I question people’s answers by saying, that’s clearly affected you more than it’s affected the … because *you’ve* been hurt by it, you don’t want to go to work the next morning and find out that the Poms have beaten us in cricket and therefore you duck and weave, at my interviews, I can always tell the Collingwood reporters, because it’s almost like they were bitter. And it’s an affront that you’ve lost a game, and *you’ve* lost the game, and I’m feeling it. Hello. |
| **Questioner** |
| Yeah, hi Mick. First, congratulations on 2010. You made a lot of people in my family very happy, but do you actually … do you miss coaching, and in particular, do you miss coaching Collingwood? |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| It’s a good question. There’s certain aspects of coaching I miss, very much miss. When that ball bounces and all of a sudden it becomes no 18 versus 18 and you’ve got to get that forward line at various times, you’ve got to be able to manipulate the side so that it actually suppresses the opposition. I work on this theory that we attack their weakest point, because you can’t always get hold of their best point, so tackle their weakest point. And I love playing that game. I always say to players, play chess, don’t play draughts. Get in and know the next and next and next move. So I miss that. There’s a lot of other stuff I don’t miss.  Do I miss coaching Collingwood? Um, I think when you’ve worked with a club for so long, with a group of players for so long, and you can just see them maturing into something that you would really think is going to be a dynasty, of course you miss it. |
| **Martin Flanagan**  There’s a lady over here. Oh sorry. |
| **Questioner** |
| That’s OK. Thanks Martin. Thanks very much for your presentation Mick. I come from a long line of women supporters of Collingwood, so very strong female supporters in my family and I witnessed my mother use an umbrella at a Collingwood match that … she’s a very mild-mannered lady, which I never thought an umbrella was meant to be used for. That said, I’m very interested in your thoughts about the role of women in the AFL and obviously I think there are, correct me if I’m wrong, I think they’re more than half of the supporter base for the AFL and obviously been part of raising footballers. But that role has been changing as we’ve seen women go onto boards and I was wondering what your thoughts were about how women’s involvement in leadership in the AFL may change the game, or add to it in some way. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Yeah, I don’t know if I’m equipped for this one. You’re right, I think there’s 47 or 48% women/men ratio in terms of membership. You know, we know football is light beer and wine, as opposed to rugby which is heavy beer and basically 80% men and 20% women. So the dynamics suggest that women have a fair amount to play in football. We’ve got goal umpires, or at least one, board members, commissioners. I couldn’t possibly see a female play the game, and I doubt that there would be umpires. Maybe I’m wrong, but there is already one goal umpire, so perhaps that’s wrong.  On the female touch. If the game’s to progress, it’s clearly got to have female touch there as well. I don’t know where it’s going to go, quite frankly. I really don’t. I’ve never really bothered with it, I just see the mums … there’s mums involved all the way through. My mum’s been involved all the way through, from the day that someone knocked on my door, these kids and this one bloke who wanted to start a football side at Wendouree West, and said, we want your son to play football. And she said, he’s 8, and it’s under 14, and they said we’re not interested in how good he is, we just need 15, otherwise we have to forfeit. To the day, 2009, August 18th, when I leant over her probably for the last time, in the hospital and said, you know, mum is everything OK, she said, Michael I worry about you. Three hours later, she died. So you know, all mums are like that, or most mums are like that, that just want to see their son play football.  It is a … it’s a great game, it needs solid support from both sides of the gender, or both genders. We’ve got a female commissioners. Will we have a chief commissioner? I don’t see, with some of the great organisations have female commissioners. Or chiefs. It’s what you can add value to. It’s not a matter of … you see, I don’t believe in tokenism. Now, if a club goes … oh, listen, we have to have a female. We appoint a female. Well, whoopee. But if we’ve got to go out and go, we can have Sally … can’t think of her surname now, who is just a wonderful achiever, and she comes on board and does some fantastic things at our football club. She’s there because she’s value, not because she’s a female. I dare say that girl who’s the goal umpire, I see her regularly now in finals, so clearly if she’s been selected for finals, she must be better than a lot of men.  So that’s all I say. If you’re good enough, get on board. But I don’t know where it’s going to go from there. I’ve never really worried about it, quite frankly. |
| **Questioner** |
| Hi Mick. Indigenous people, 2.6% of the population, 11% of players in the AFL. I guess, we achieve very highly, Brownlow medallist, captains etc. What hope do we really have in society to stamp out racism if a field that we excel in, like AFL still has racism in it. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Well, that’s going to be a world problem as much as it’s an Australian problem, and we are less tolerant of people who offend and the more we can be … can get to the point where less tolerant becomes no tolerance, then we’re going to be better for it, when it comes absolutely intolerable to offend someone because of their colour, or creed, or whatever else it may be. I think the Players’ Association themselves have got … they are such a strong body, they have to set up where it is to totally frowned upon that that person is not only penalised by the AFL, it’s got to be internal where … it’s a bit like where in America, if you grab a face mask and twist, you’re going to break someone’s neck. And the Players’ Association, they are so … they frown upon that type of behaviour and it’s an intolerance that they … well, it’s something they won’t put up with.  There’s other things that worry me in football that the Players’ Association haven’t come out strongly enough about, but that’s one area where they can be that strong, and so strong. Now how do you stop the idiot on the other side of the fence? Well, again, if you look around the world, there’s signs up. We will not accept this. Ring this number, or inform this person. And we will get that person out of the stadium. It’s a hard lesson, because some … it’s total ignorance, and until we get that part of that ignorance out of our society, unfortunately you’re going to have an idiot that’s going to be in that position. But, mark my words, it’s a lot less, but on the same token, *any* racial vilification is unacceptable. No matter how far it’s come down, it’s got to be totally obliterated. It’s a tolerance thing. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| All right? That’s it I think. Oh, no, a gentleman over here. |
| **Questioner** |
| Just a question for Mick. You speak formally about the upbringing and playing in country football as a young fella, I think many of us have experienced that. We’ve a really shiny brand called the AFL and the sports science and everything that’s creeping into the game. When you look at community football now, out in the regional areas of Victoria, we have diminishing numbers. We have teams that are folding. Dare is say, teams like Manangatang merging with Tooleybuc. I just think – what do you think about the fact that we have this upper echelon, this really shiny brand, but at the heart of it, our community seems to be really suffering from the advancements in sports science. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Well I don’t think sports science has got anything to do with that. I can remember the team Tempy Gorya Patchewollock, there’s four sides that have combined twenty years ago, so … you said sports science. I’d be wondering what you’re talking about. Dr Spock come down or something. So, really, sports science has got nothing to do with community football. It’s just that if the towns diminish and they haven’t got enough numbers, like Wendouree West, I was the 16th player, they didn’t have … or 15th player. They wouldn’t have had a game. So that’s just the way things have evolved in the communities. Some towns have got smaller, some towns don’t have that capacity now to put two, a netball and a football side out there, so they’ve got to join up. And other sides … you know, one of the ones I follow, and I follow it only because my grandfather played for Gordon. The Central Highlands Football League has now expanded into another competition where there’s about 20-odd sides. I think it must be twenty teams. It’s fantastic. It’s a great combination. And others will diminish, because there’s no people there. I mean, I don’t think the AFL’s responsible for that. I think we can blame the AFL for a lot of things, but we can’t blame them if people choose to leave little towns to go away. I think the money to be fed back into those systems has got to be enhanced because it is … there are just as many country footballers come down and play at AFL level, as there is city people. Or thereabouts. There used to be anyway. Perhaps we ought to put more money into that.  But my understanding is that the AFL had not neglected that area. Sometimes it’s far better to run a good successful competition with eight to ten sides than it is to run something that was historically … there’s four or five sides and that’s all there is, and now they’re struggling for numbers. So, I used to be a little bit out this side and have a crack at the AFL about that, but I can now sit in the middle and go, let me weigh this up. I think that things are not too bad.  Martin, I know we’re supposed to finish at 2 o’clock. I want to ask you a few questions.  I want to know a little bit about your books and how many books you’ve written and which is your favourite. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| I think I’ve written twelve or thirteen. And one of them, the one on Tom Wills, became a play, which was on at the Malthouse Theatre and Tom Wills, it’s a very long story, I won’t start it now, but he grew up, his father was the first white settler at Ararat, and he grew up playing with the Djab wurrung, the kids, the Djab wurrung kids, and he had a brother Horace, whose grandson is still alive and the grandson told me that Tom Wills played Aboriginal football with the children of the Djab wurrung, and Tom Wills’ story is a huge story. I’d need a long time to tell it. But he ended up committing suicide, and being buried in an unmarked grave, actually here at Heidelberg. But he’s … if he’s not the founder of our game, he’s a key figure in the creation of it. And we did that as a play with Aboriginal actors, Earl Rosas a great Aboriginal dancer, Aboriginal choreographer, and that was a fantastic thing to be involved with. Just hearing you talk about teams, Mick, like writing is a very solitary thing, and I often envy musicians for the fact that they can play in groups, and doing that play is the closest I’ve come to playing in groups.  So, yeah, I’ve loved that but I’ve also loved being a journalist. I’ve been very lucky that *The Age* has been a good newspaper while I’ve been there and the great joy of journalism, is that it makes you meet people you’d never otherwise meet, and makes you go places you’d otherwise never go. And footy’s just such a fantastic passport around this country, and you know, as I was saying before with Liam Jurrah, I mean, I met him when he first came to Melbourne in 2007, and the first two times I met him, I only got one word out of him, on both occasions. And I’d been to Yuendumu in the 1980s and that was actually where I first really felt the power of Aboriginal law, and to know where he’s come from, the cultural gap that he’s arced, such an amazing story. So footy’s just been a wonderful passport for me, through this country, because you know, journalists aren’t loved but when you’re involved with footy and you turn up at footy clubs, all of a sudden, people start talking to you. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| What’s the next phase of your career? Like, your story. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| Like you, I’m a grandfather. And so that’s become a huge thing in my life and writing books is getting more and more difficult. Books are selling fewer and fewer. Sometimes I feel a bit like a weaver at the start of the industrial revolution, because newspapers are going like that, and books are going like that. And you know, I look after my grandkids one day a week and I get a real kick out of it, I get a real joy out of it. And I think, you know, writing books is very hard work, for not a lot back. But I did spend five years working on a book with Michael Long and then he didn’t want to do it. Then it sort of fell through. So I’m currently writing a book, not writing a book about Michael Long, called the Short Long Book. Because if someone had said to me, you could have five years spending time with Michael Long and not write a book about it, those experiences, I would have taken the experiences and … but, you know, he’s one of the most amazing characters I’ve met through sport. I’ve met some pretty amazing people through sport, but Longie’s seriously out there. I mean, he’s like a hallucinogenic drug, he’s so far out there. We just happened to co-habit with him through this game called Australian football. But to spend time with him, and to have experiences with him, that’s been a marvellous thing and that’s what I’m working on at the moment. I’m also working on two television documentaries. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Are we allowed to know what sort of documentaries? |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| Yeah, my father was on the Burma Railway with Weary Dunlop, and he’s 98 now and he and I wrote a book about that experience, so I grew up with a father that was a very unusual man, he was … in one of my books I said he was like a hard old monk, he had no interest in social status, he thought that was comic, he had no interest in money beyond the practical. He was awfully hard if not impossible to impress, and really, the one thing I had in common with him was footy, so a lot of my footy writing was really writing letters to my father.  But we wrote this book about the Burma Railway where he actually described the experience and then I wrote about what it was to grow up as the son of someone … like some Jewish people talk about being children of the Holocaust. We were children of the Burma Railway.  So, we’re doing that as a documentary. And one of my close friends is a fella called Shane Howard, who wrote a song called *Solid Rock*. And a great Richmond supporter. And he’s a great story, and a great fella, and he’s never really got his just rewards in terms of media and so I’m working on a documentary which I hope will make people understand what a remarkable journey he’s had, in this land. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| So, your brother’s also an author. And to have two people who’ve obviously got a passion and a love and are obviously very good at it, so was it your dad or your mum? |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| Um, I think it’s both sides, but my dad is a beautiful writer. He doesn’t write very much. If he was a musician I’d say he never wrote many albums and he never made many albums and he didn’t play that often, but when he … he plays certain notes better than anyone I’ve ever heard. And as he gets older, his writing gets smaller and smaller, as does mine. On my mother’s side, there was a family of quite brilliant people, who were Irish, who came out as convicts. And they falsified their family history. They were great story-tellers, so I think we got something from them as well.  And I’ve also got a sister, who’s a very good writer. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Just to enhance, just to go on with that one. So settlement was Tasmania? So, you settled in Tasmania, and that was from the convict days. So where did you settle? Did you settle in Hobart town? |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| Well, the convict, the convict Flanagan was sent to Evandale, to Longford, at the same time as Ned Kelly’s father was at Evandale. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| They didn’t spend any time over at … I was explaining to the Vice-Chancellor about Strahan. About the Sarah Island. |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| No, they were … one was on the other side, on the east coast, on Maria Island. And the other was a ticket-of-leave man up the middle of the island. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| OK. So your mum and dad … your father’s still alive. Is your mum … |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| Yeah, mum’s still alive too. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| And in Tasmania? |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| Yeah, all my family’s in Tasmania but me. I’m one of six kids and I’m the only one who left the island. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| And I’ve read one of your brother’s books. *The Gould Book of Fish*. I did finish it. I’d recommend it to anyone, if you want to read it. So has he got any projects on the way? |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| Oh, always. He’s actually writing a novel on the Burma Railway. |
| **Mick Malthouse** |
| Oh, is he helping you with this one? |
| **Martin Flanagan** |
| No. He and I are very different because I’m a journalist and to me that means that the world is never as I imagine it to be. And given that I’m a pessimist, I often … the world often delights me. Because I keep meeting people I like and finding things that I think are good, and so I get a real thrill out of that. So my story starts where my imagination ends. He writes about the world as he imagines it to be. So I’m going that way, and he’s going that way. |
| **Mick Malthouse**  What a great contrast. Martin Flanagan. [applause] |
| **Robert Manne** |
| Well, we have to unfortunately conclude. It’s been an incredible privilege to hear this conversation. I mean, I knew that it was a great thing that the university had asked Mick to join us, but really this is the … I think everyone here knows what an extraordinary person you are, a humane person. It’s been a great privilege.  It’s also wonderful to have Martin … I don’t know whether he’s been at this university before, but it’s great to have his grizzled face, speak from the heart, as he always does. And so anyhow, I think I speak for everyone in saying how privileged we’ve been … |