

FEATURE STORY

Games of the 90s

in the No.9 Waverly Wet

We asked you to choose the best games of the decade, excluding the obvious favourite of the '93 flag. These are your **Top 10**

No. 10 Farewell Harvs

ROUND 22 1997			
ESSENDON	16	6	(102) d
ADELAIDE	14	14	(98)
Best: Denham, Hardwick, Cockatoo-Collins, Lloyd, Wallis, Caracella, Moorcroft.			
Goals: Lloyd, Cockatoo-Collins 5, Moorcroft 3, Denham 2, Cransberg.			

Essendon's hopes of giving Mark Harvey a winning send off in his 206th and last AFL game looked pretty sick in the first quarter, after the Crows (destined to win the flag) kicked the first five goals in 11 minutes. It didn't look much flashier at half time, when Adelaide led by 31 points. The Bombers were missing James Hird, Michael Long, Mark Mercuri, Joe Misiti, Steve Alessio and Darren Bewick.

But if there's one thing that has characterised Essendon during the 1990s, it has been an unwillingness to give in. And when there was Harvs to honor — a player who had given more of himself physically to the Bombers over 14 seasons than perhaps any other of his era — as well as Kevin Sheedy celebrating his 400th game in charge of the Dons, young

fellows were going to rise to the occasion.

Matthew Lloyd, Scott Lucas, Gary Moorcroft and Che Cockatoo-Collins all lifted in the second half, while veterans Sean Denham, Chris Daniher and Dean Wallis also played significant roles. Just as it had done in the 1993 prelim, the momentum swung towards us and the players, sensing another upset, lifted across the ground. Harvs, the last playing member of the 1984-85 Premiership sides, left the field in tears after a lap of honor. Fair to say, he wasn't the only person at the ground with a tear in his eye.

What You Said:

"A passionate, inspiring win that should have provided great drive going into 1998." - *Braid Lister.*



What You Said:

"For guts and determination at Waverley Park, the one goal win before the finals was a morale booster." (Anon)

This was a less than typical hard-fought Essendon victory. Instead of the glorious come-from-behind win, it was an inspirational defensive effort in the last 10 minutes that gave the Bombers the game in the face of a howling wind, rain and a long list of injuries. It was also a match to decide top spot on the ladder.

Essendon jumped away to a four-goal lead by quarter time, and stretched that to 28 points at the last change, but Collingwood was coming home with the wind, and the Bombers were down to 15 fit men. That the Dons held on was a tribute to players such as Mark Thompson, who famously hurled himself onto the ball and opponents' boots in the last few minutes, and Gary O'Donnell, who shut down the dangerous Peter Daicos.

In the end, the Bombers won by six points, with no goals scored after the 18-minute mark of the last quarter, but it was a victory that took much out of the players. The game was also significant for being the first live telecast of a home-and-away game. The match at VFL Park was televised after being declared a sellout. In the end, 65,293 people attended.

No. 8 Daylight Robbery

ROUND 18 1998

ESSENDON	12	12	(84) d
CARLTON	11	12	(78)

Best: Lloyd, Hardwick, Mercuri, Fletcher, Calthorpe..

Goals: Lloyd 6, Johnson, Caracella, Lucas, Barnard, Cockatoo-Collins, O'Connor.

The pulsating final 15 minutes of this match brought five unanswered Essendon goals and one of the more unlikely wins in the club's history.

The match was tight all day, but Carlton's three goals in the first eight minutes of the last quarter seemed to have settled the issue, giving the Blues a 25-point lead, which in the context of a low-scoring match seemed insurmountable.

Step forward Jason Johnson, Matthew Lloyd, Ryan O'Connor, Gary Moorcroft and, ultimately and most dramatically, Scott Lucas. Johnson's fresh legs kept bringing the ball out of the middle, and a tiring Carlton became mistake-prone.

The Bombers levelled the score with a Moorcroft long-bomb. Almost immediately Blue Adam White chipped the ball inboard towards Dean Rice, but it was intercepted by Moorcroft, who got the ball to Mark Mercuri. His shot seemed certain to score until Stephen Silvagni marked brilliantly running with the flight of the ball. Then the hero turned villain. Silvagni tried to pass to the hapless Rice, but the ball spilled to Lucas, whose trusty left foot drilled a goal with 30 seconds left on the clock.

What You Said:

"I was swearing when Silvagni took the mark, but almost by the time I'd finished belting my footy record against the seat in front of me, Scotty had already sealed it. Bliss!" - Gary Belmont.



What You Said:

"Watching him was so exciting, almost Ablett-like. Pure domination." - Greg Harkus.
 "It was my son's first game and he'll always remember it as the day Matthew Lloyd kicked 13, and he went to the footy for the first time. Lochlan says it was his "best day ever" and it nearly bought a tear to the eye." - Robert Meredith.

No. 7 Loydy's Game

ROUND 3 1999

ESSENDON	22	17	(149) d
SYDNEY	9	14	(68)

Best: Lloyd, Mercuri, Blumfield, Bewick, Long, Caracella, Heffernan.

Goals: Lloyd 13, Mercuri 2, Bewick 2, Long, Heffernan, Alessio, Blumfield, Rioli

Matthew Lloyd 13.4 (82) d Sydney 9.14 (68). Sure, we know there were 21 other Bombers on the field that day, but this was Lloyd's match.

He took 14 marks, saw off five Sydney opponents, certainly took away three Brownlow votes and kick-started Essendon's 1999 season. Troy Luff had two goes at the Bomber spearhead, and Andrew Dunkley, Adam Goodes, first-gamer Gerrard Bennett and Rowan Warfe also had a turn.

Lloyd was well served by an array of midfielders. Mark Mercuri, Justin Blumfield, Darren Bewick and Michael Long all contributed to the massacre. The match was also notable for the classy debut of Dean Rioli, promoted that week from the rookie list. Like Lloyd, he's young, absurdly talented, and knows exactly where the goals are.

Boris's No. 6 Party

ROUND 7 1996

ESSENDON	22	11	(143) d
GEELONG	17	12	(114)

Best: Bewick, Daniher, Misiti, Mercuri, Wellman, Hird, Cummings.

Goals: Bewick 9, Cummings 4, Misiti, Daniher 2, Mercuri, Hird, Cockatoo-Collins, Long, Prior.

It was AFL celebration time, and the Bombers' share of the centenary cake was a re-enactment match against Geelong, its first VFL opponent. The game began with fireworks and ended with them as well, as Darren Bewick's comeback game after 11 months on the sidelines with an injured knee brought five last quarter goals and an unlikely win.

Geelong led by 14 points three minutes into the final term, but Essendon kicked the next seven goals to overwhelm the Cats in front of more than 75,000 fans. Bewick was electrifying, playing with all his old panache — and importantly, all his old speed — and totally bamboozling the Geelong defence. He teased, dodged, ran and marked in his →

No. 5 The Power of One

QUALIFYING FINAL 1990

ESSENDON	22	12	(144) d
WEST COAST	8	19	(67)

Best: Hird, Bewick, Denham, Somerville, Alessio, Young, Wallis.

Goals: Alessio 5, Cockatoo-Collins, Hird 4, Fletcher 3, O'Donnell 2, Mercuri, Lloyd, Misiti, Denham

chalk this one up to Kevin Sheedy. When it comes to mind games, the Bomber coach is in a league of his own, and his efforts in the run-up to this crucial final were, even by his own exalted standards, quite magnificent.

The Eagles were already on the back foot, with coach Mick Malthouse grouching about the fact that West Coast, winners in the first week of the finals, had to travel to Melbourne to play Essendon, losers in the first week. The Sheedy response was to invite all Victorian supporters to come to the MCG and barrack for the Victorian side.

The reaction to this seemingly audacious request (Collingwood supporters getting behind the Bombers!?) was a roll up of 85,656, about 100 or so, it seemed, shouting for the Eagles. Somehow West Coast seemed defeated before they stepped onto the ground, and they were never in the contest. Peter Somerville, playing probably his best game for Essendon, gave the Bombers first use of the ball all day. At quarter time it was 5.4 to 0.3, and the race was effectively over.

The Eagles came back in the second term, but a huge goal to Hird after the siren seemed to knock the stuffing out of them, and a 13 goals to four second half followed, allowing the Bombers to streak to a 77-point victory. Hird was taken off in the last quarter, but returned to kick one of the goals of the year. He was on Peter Sumich at full-back, ran off the lumbering Eagle, delivered to Ben Doolan and kept on sprinting. Hird got the ball back near the 50-metre arc and bombed a magnificent goal. All class.

It was a day when everything Sheedy tried seemed to work: Barry Young was devastating at centre half-back, Darren Bewick, Sean Denham and Gary O'Donnell dominated the clearances. Steve Alessio notched five goals.

But it was perhaps five minutes from the end of the match that the true highlight happened, one that still sends a shiver down the spine of all at the ground. The traditional jacket and scarf-waving began, and the entire MCG became a seething, awe-inspiring mass of red and black. All that was left to Malthouse was the two-finger salute he gave the crowd as he left the oval.

What They Said:

"I'd like to thank all the Victorian people who put their hands up for us. We've made a conscious decision not to take players from down the bottom. We haven't pinched players from Footscray and Fitzroy. Somewhere along the line, that's got to pay." - Kevin Sheedy.

What You Said:

"What a finale. 80,000 people waving the whinging Eagles off the G ... we just belted them. The feeling in the crowd was euphoric, I knew Carlton supporters that were waving Essendon jackets. It was like a State of Origin where people cared about the result." - Robert Meredith.



unfamiliar re-enactment guernsey. About the only thing he didn't do was handpass.

There were two disappointments from the match — the minor one that Boris didn't kick 10, and the major one, a serious knee injury to Michael Long that ended his season.

What You Said:

"All of Darren Bewick's goals were great, especially the five in the last quarter. The fireworks and all the celebrations made it even more memorable." - Lisa Spinelli.



No. 4 The Jacket Match

ROUND 16 1993			
ESSENDON	12	17	(89) d
WEST COAST	13	9	(87)
Best: Wanganeen, Long, Bewick, Hird, Wallis, O'Donnell.			
Goals: Hird 2, Kickett 2, Somerville 2, Salmon, Bewick, Symons, Long, Plain, Wallis.			

This extraordinary game will always be remembered for its immediate aftermath, the now immortal Kevin Sheedy jacket-waving incident.

It might as easily be remembered for the individual brilliance of many of the players, for the tension of the last quarters, for the mistakes and miskicks that kept this match twisting and turning until the final seconds, or even for the post-match physical confrontation between Eagles coach Mick Malthouse and a footy writer. Essendon-West Coast matches always seem to provide something remarkable.

Essendon had lost the previous week to North Melbourne - a win that week would have seen them on top of the ladder, but the defeat sent them tumbling to seventh. West

Coast were quick out of the blocks, with Peter Matera dominating on a wing and its defence in control and held a 14 point lead at quarter time. In a sign of things to come, Paul Salmon missed a straight-forward shot at goal in the last minute.

Early in the second quarter he had another set shot for another miss. Brilliant marking from Michael Symons kept the Bombers in the game. Essendon was dominating around the ground, but not converting up forward until first Derek Kickett and then Darren Bewick scored fine goals. A goal to Symons saw the Dons hit the front, but the Eagles fought back with three quick majors to lead by 11 points at half time.

The third quarter began with an awful miss from 10 metres out by Salmon, but by the →



What They Said:
 "I've never zoned in on a kick mentally as much in my life, I don't think. The trouble wasn't technical, it was just mental. I had a couple of teammates come up and say, 'You better bloody kick this one or else.' I'm usually very good in that area, and I let myself down and my teammates. In the end, to see that one go through was an enormous relief." - Paul Salmon

What You Said:
 "I missed a game of club football to be at this one, but for a while I wondered whether I'd made the right decision. Then Paul Salmon finally kicked a goal with 25 seconds left, after kicking nothing but points earlier. In the end, it was worth it." - Michael Bilotte.

end of the quarter Essendon led by 13 points, with James Hird dominating up forward. The highlight of the quarter was Kickett's 70-metre torpedo goal. A shocking free kick to Chris Waterman for a goal began the final term. Then Peter Sumich snapped a rare right foot goal.

Kickett, Peter Somerville and Dean Wallis all missed goal chances, and Salmon failed to score from 50 metres out. With three minutes left, West Coast were four points in front. Bewick swept the ball forward to Wallis, who marked one-handed. He put it in front of Salmon, who was held by the jumper by Glenn Jakovich.

Salmon, with 0.3 to his name, was 40 metres out. He made his usual careful preparation, and fired it through. Fish's reaction was more of embarrassment than of joy. Sheedy, of course, made up for that after the siren, emerging from the coach's box with jacket swinging above his head and a scathing look towards the West Coast box.

No. 3 The Comeback

ROUND 6 1992			
ESSENDON	18	16	(124) d
MELBOURNE	19	9	(123)
Best: Salmon, Kickett, Wanganeen, Harvey, Long, Sporn, Anderson.			
Goals: Salmon 7, Somerville 3, Wanganeen 2, T Daniher 2, Long, Ezard, Wallis, Flood.			



What They Said:
 "It was just such a buzz, not so much because I kicked a few goals myself, but to see the look of real intent in the guys' faces - they knew they could win the game as the last quarter progressed, and after the game it was just one in-all in." - Paul Salmon.
 "We got out of jail, no doubt about that." - Mark Harvey.

What You Said:
 "Another sensational comeback that showed that we had the personnel to perform under pressure and deliver the goods which showed tremendous character." - Yvonne Lewis.

While the 1993 preliminary final will remain a fond memory for all of us, there was another statistically more spectacular comeback a year earlier.

On Anzac Day 1992, most Essendon supporters spent the three-quarter time break wondering at what point of the final term they might sneak out of the MCG - that 'let's-beat-the-traffic' or 'let's-get-an-early-train' thinking that's hard to ignore when your side is seven goals down.

Melbourne was 18.7, the Bombers were 10.14 and there wasn't a lot in the Dons' play during the first three quarters to suggest they were about to turn things around.

When Melbourne forward Chris Sullivan potted the first goal of the final term within a couple of minutes, blowing out the margin to 47 points, it was time to think about packing the Thermos. But a little more than 10 minutes later, after a barrage of Bomber goals, Essendon was within 12 points of the Demons, and the 41,000-strong crowd was in a frenzy. Peter Somerville sparked the recovery with a goal five minutes in. Then followed, in quick succession, majors to Paul Salmon, Dean Wallis (after a miraculous one-handed mark on the

edge of the goal square), Salmon again, Somerville again, and then, inevitably, Salmon for his third of the quarter.

Three minutes later Michael Long, cool in the crisis, squared the ball for Salmon, who booted his fourth for the term and seventh for the match. In defence, Derek Kickett was throwing himself about with abandon. One tumbling mark was spectacular, but more was to come later.

Wallis marked 25 metres out. The Essendon crowd behind the goal went up for the kick, but the goal umpire ruled a point. Melbourne was simply not in the match. Then a 50-metre special from Anthony Daniher just missed. The Bombers were within four points.

There was a hiatus, then Melbourne began to attack. Glenn Lovett had a shot but failed to score; a Cuthbertson attempt sailed out on the full, and a Williams point stretched the lead to five points. A Garry Lyon shot was marked in the square by Kickett.

Then came the crucial couple of minutes.

The ball was swept forward, and Gavin Wanganeen laid a perfect tackle, winning a free on the 50-metre arc. It looked a little far, but Wanganeen summoned his strength and the ball sailed through post-high. Incredibly, 27 and a half minutes in, Essendon led by a point.

There was yet more drama as Melbourne attacked and Stephen Tingay kicked for goal. It seemed certain to elude a twisting Derek Kickett and at least score a point to tie the game, but somehow Kickett elongated his body and grabbed an extraordinary mark in his fingertips, crashing into the goalpost in the process.

Now the game was all smotherers, heavy tackles, dives and knock-ons. David Flood took a strong mark on what proved to be the Demons' final foray on goal. When the siren sounded, with Essendon a point in front, a gleeful Kevin Sheedy sprinted across the ground to greet his players. Single quarter turnarounds don't come much more remarkable than that.

No. 2 The Shootout

ROUND 6 1993			
ESSENDON	23	18	(156) d
GEELONG	19	18	(132)
Best: Misiti, Salmon, O'Donnell, Thompson, Harvey, Olarenshaw.			
Goals: Salmon 10, Bewick 4, Alessio 3, Symons 2, Mercuri, O'Donnell, Grenvold, Hills			



What They Said:
 "It was just such a buzz, not so much because I kicked a few goals myself, but to see the look of real intent in the guys' faces - they knew they could win the game as the last quarter progressed, and after the game it was just one in-all in." - Paul Salmon.
 "We got out of jail, no doubt about that." - Mark Harvey.

What They Said:
 "It was one of our best games for a long time, and it also has to be considered as one of our gutsiest wins ever." - Kevin Sheedy.

What You Said:
 "Salmon's 10 goals was a fantastic individual effort and the difference between the sides. And watching the great Gary Ablett kick 14 goals in a losing team is something I will never forget." - Vince Canturi.

It was the kind of match a defensive-minded coach like Mick Malthouse might wish were consigned to the dustbin, but those who cherish attacking, high-scoring football will always have the 1993 round six Essendon-Geelong shootout near the top of their favorite game lists.

Geelong, under coach Malcolm Blight, was renowned for its goal-scoring - with Gary Ablett roaming the forward line, it was never likely to be otherwise - but Essendon also had its share of quality attackers.

This game will always be remembered as the Salmon-Ablett goalfest. Ablett won the individual battle with the Big Fish by a 14 goals to 10 margin, but more importantly, Essendon won the match.

Salmon had three goals in the first six minutes of the match and had already seen off Tim McGrath; Ablett four by quarter time. Chris Daniher was then replaced on Ablett by Derek Kickett, who lasted until early in the third quarter and another five goals. James Hird then got the unenviable task.

By three-quarter time, Ablett had notched a neat dozen, and Salmon had 9.5. Each of the spearheads had totally dominated his side's scoring: Essendon was just a goal in front,

17 to 16 at the last break. Salmon opened the scoring after a questionable free kick straight in front, his seventh goal on Stephen O'Reilly. Ablett was paid an even more questionable mark and goaled from 50 metres. Then his 14th followed to give the Cats a lead of nine points with 11 minutes left in the match.

It seemed impossible that a team could lose a match with its full-forward kicking so many goals, and Essendon spirits were further deflated when Salmon limped from the ground with a hamstring strain.

Channel Seven's Peter Landy, always one for hyperbole, was heard to declare this was "one of the best games of all time". Truth is,

it was hard to disagree. The ball swept speedily from one end to the other. Gavin Wanganeen leapt for a stunning mark, and concussed himself on his return to earth, leaving the field in the arms of the trainers.

Somehow Essendon bounced back with the final five goals of the day - including two within a minute to Salmon's replacement, Steve Alessio - settling the issue once and for all. The siren sounded with Essendon victorious by, in the end, a comfortable four goals, 23.18 to 19.18. And Ablett was left with one record he didn't want - the highest individual tally (14.7) by a player on a losing side.

No. 1 Back from the Dead

THE PRELIMINARY FINAL 1993

ESSENDON	17	9	(111) d
ADELAIDE	15	16	(100)

Best: Long, Bewick, Denham, O'Donnell, Thompson, Watson.

Goals: Bewick 6, Salmon 4, Watson 2, Mercuri, Hird, Kickett, O'Donnell, Long

bomber fans have been to a few revival meetings over the years, but none to match the 1993 preliminary final.

It wasn't just the magnitude of the reversal — from 42 points in arrears at half-time — that stirred the soul. It was the context. Win, and a place in the Grand Final was theirs; lose, and a season that against reason and all the odds promised so much was snuffed out.

At the long break Essendon was under siege from an Adelaide side that looked certain to make its first Grand Final. There wasn't much in the first quarter to suggest a blow out: Adelaide goaled within a minute of the start of the game, but Essendon replied through Tim Watson and Paul Salmon and were performing well enough in general play. Nineteen points down at quarter time didn't seem too disastrous.

The second term, however, was a nightmare. Two early majors put the Crows five in front, and they were peppering the goals, totally in command. Derek Kickett's goal was Essendon's first score of the quarter, by which time Adelaide had managed eight scoring shots. The Bombers were kicking out on the full, having handpasses intercepted and generally playing like a side on its last legs.

At half time, Kevin Sheedy's address to the players has gone down in history as the catalyst for the revival, which would reap 11.3 to 2.4 and one of the greatest turnarounds in VFL-AFL history.

But there were many on-field heroes in the second half — Michael Long bursting from the centre square in a rehearsal of what he would turn on in the grand final; Bomber Thompson turning back every Crow attack; Gary O'Donnell and Sean Denham running hard, straight and tirelessly; Darren Bewick

showing his stunning speed and goal sense (he managed six for the afternoon). But it was a genuine team effort.

The Bombers' football was fearless and desperate. Bodies were put on the line in every contest, and Adelaide was harassed and pressured until it cracked. It took until almost halfway through the final quarter for the Dons to hit the lead with an O'Donnell goal, but the result hardly seemed in doubt any more.

The final goal was an emotional release for the Essendon fans in the 76,380 crowd. Tim Watson grabbed the ball on the outer wing and his left-foot kick slewed off his boot, but he

kept running forward and through a pack battling for the ball. Somehow he picked it up from the melee and threw it onto his foot — it sailed through from 40 metres out and the stadium erupted.

The next week against Carlton, the Bombers began with the same irresistible force, again with Long and O'Donnell consistently tearing the ball out of the middle. It's hard not to see the second half against the Crows as the genesis of that Grand Final win. And that's just one of the reasons we remember it with such affection.

What They Said

"We've got a bunch of new players. They've handled their first big comeback extremely well in a tight, crucial game. But they've played like that all year, really. It's been one of their great skills. They've been a very persistent side who never, ever want to give it away."

Kevin Sheedy.

What You Said:

"The greatest game of the decade by far. Down by 7+ goals at half time and winning by 11 points is a magnificent effort, compounded by the fact that this game was deciding which team would play off in a Grand Final! Notable for the last quarter effort of the great Tim Watson and the whole game of Michael Long. Remarkable." Brad Lister.

"An amazing comeback in a game where Darren Bewick and Michael Long were the stars. To have such a comeback in a final against the Crows was unbelievable. They only played well for half a game but the feeling of the momentum shifting early in the third quarter was terrific." Tom Gilbert.

