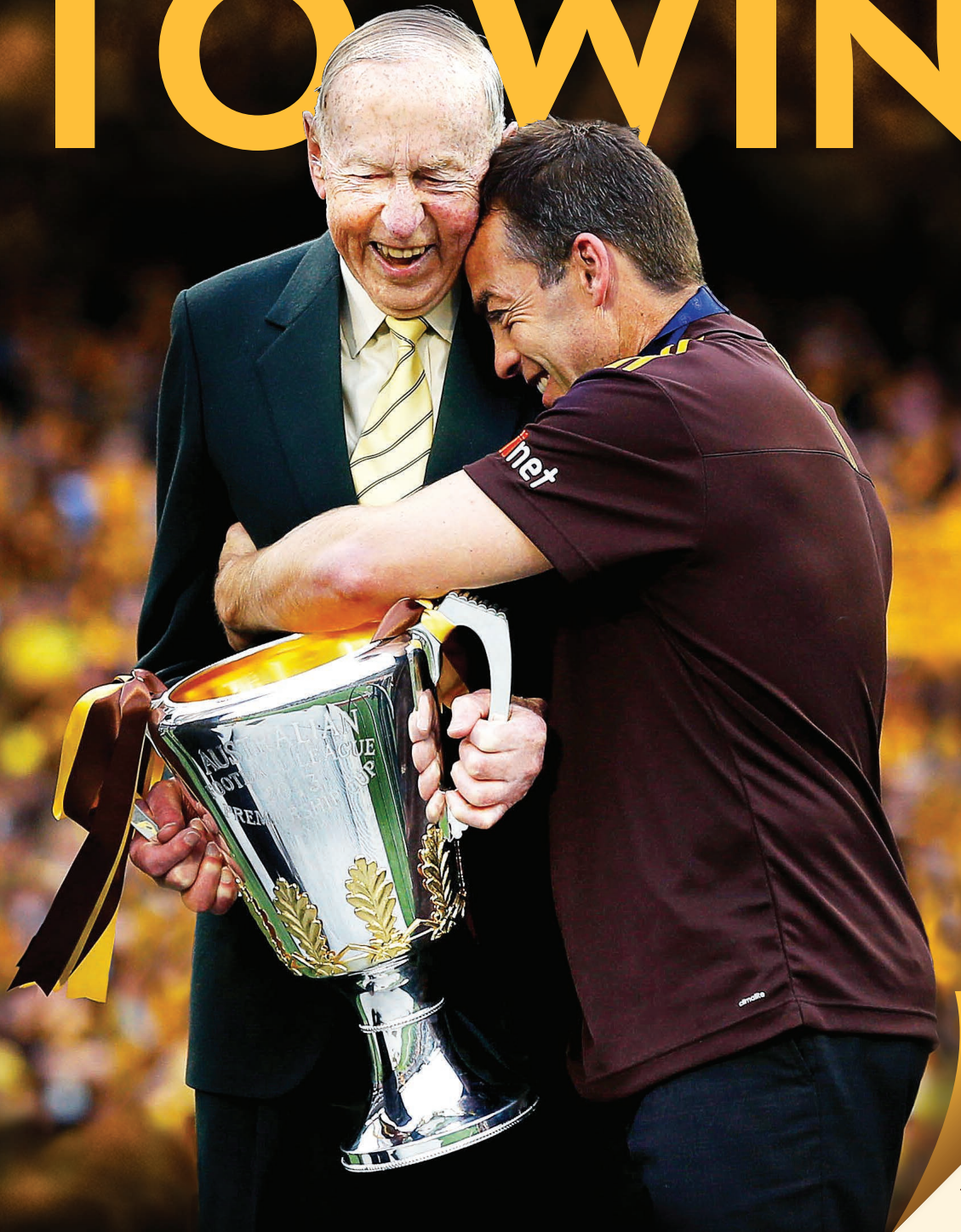


MICHAEL GORDON

THE INSIDE STORY OF HAWTHORN'S JOURNEY TO AN 11TH PREMIERSHIP

PLAYING TO WIN



EXTRACTS
INSIDE

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“There was no real address from the elated and relieved Clarkson, just an introduction. “Boys, it’s a great feeling. We missed out by a point on the development squad winning the flag, Box Hill won the (VFL) flag, Hawthorn won the (AFL) flag. What a statement that makes about our club,” he said. “We just want to play a little song ...”

ALASTAIR CLARKSON, AFTER THE 2013 GRAND FINAL



PLAYING TO WIN

Michael Gordon is the co-writer of the 2009 updated history of Hawthorn FC—*One For All*. From the completion of that book, he has had total access to Hawthorn’s inner sanctum, tracing the journey from premiers in 2008, through difficult and turbulent times, to the 2013 Premiership. The result is a brilliant insight into the way a professional sporting club operates as it seeks to produce the best from its players, coaches, and administrators.

In his foreword to *Playing To Win*, Hawthorn coach Alastair Clarkson wrote: “Michael Gordon has chronicled the progress of the club intimately over the past six years and, true to form, our club has encountered some obstacles over that journey. This account is a compelling read for all footy lovers, especially those who enjoy tracking the spirit with which a group of people band together to chase a dream.”

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Michael Gordon is a Melbourne journalist. He is the political editor of *The Age*, a Walkley Award winner and five-time winner at the United Nations Association of Australia Media Peace Awards. In 2005, he won the Graham Perkin Award for Australian Journalist of the Year. His books include *Bells: The Beach*, *The Contest*, *The Surfers* (2011), *Layne Beachley: Beneath The Waves* (2008), *A True Believer: Paul Keating* (1996), *Reconciliation: A Journey* (2001) and *Freeing Ali: The Human Face of the Pacific Solution* (2005). He is the co-author (with his father, Harry) of *One for All: The Story of the Hawthorn Football Club* (2009). He lives in Hawthorn.

THE BOOK

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POST PRELIMINARY FINAL, 2011

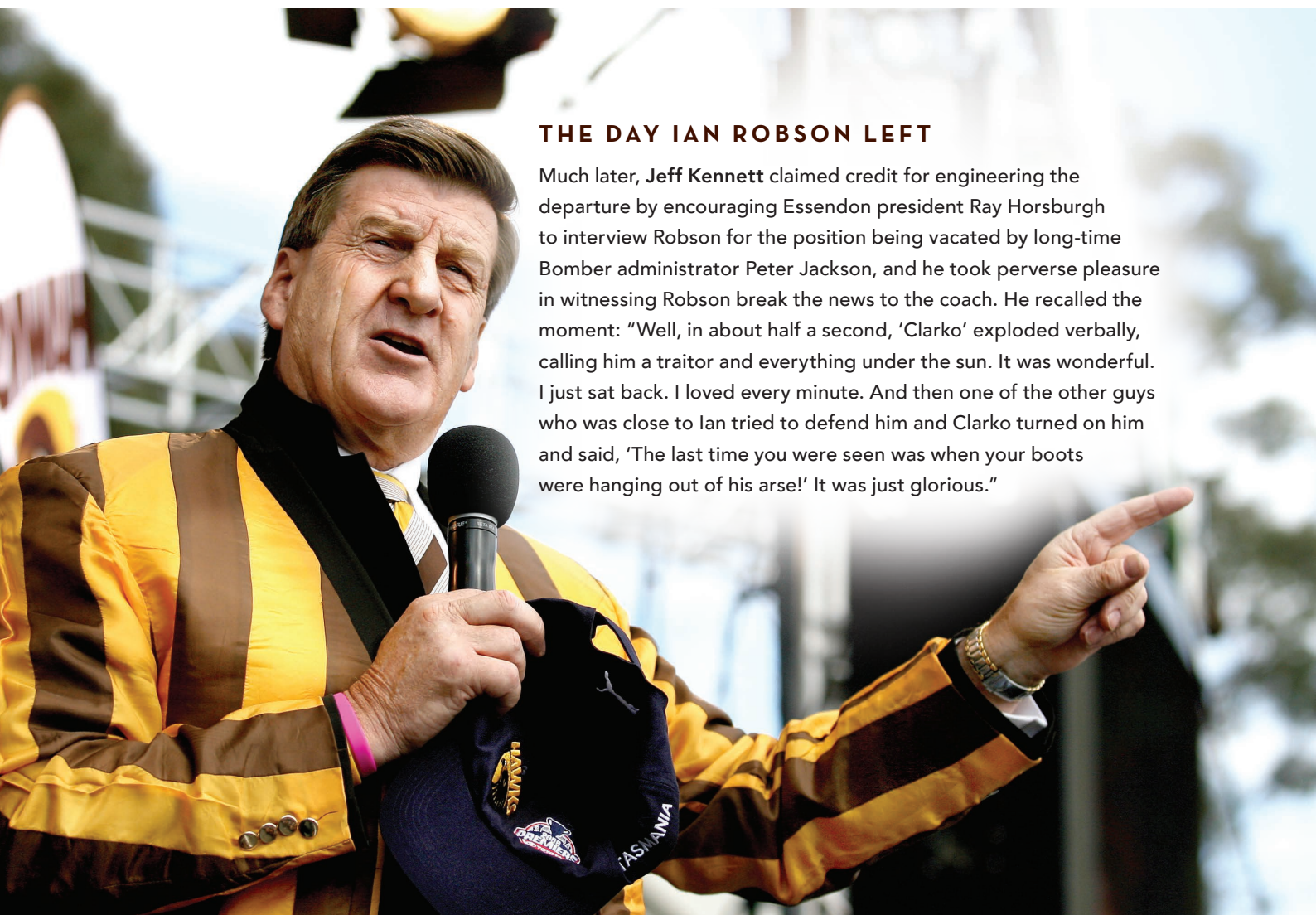
When **Alastair Clarkson** did finally address the players, who were now showered and dressed and joined by those who had missed out and a selection of board members and office-holders, including Jeff Kennett, he made no attempt to hide the shared pain, and the white-hot anger, at what had been denied.

"We've just stuffed up a golden opportunity," he began.

The message, earlier, to the media had been almost as blunt, but this was raw and unplugged. "People will say, 'Bad luck, proud effort, no one expected you to go close to Collingwood.' BUT I DID—AND SO SHOULD HAVE YOU BLOKES! That was a game that was just sitting there and we were not hard enough and tough enough for long enough, and we're going to pay a price for it—and the price is the misery that we've got to endure for the next week and beyond, knowing full well that it should be brown and gold at the MCG next Saturday.


"And some will make the decision: 'I'm going to get on the piss, I'm not even going to go to the game. It's going to hurt too much.' I've got a good mind to send us all to the game next week and really rip our guts out—because that is what it takes to be the very best.

"It's not just delivered to you. I don't want any of us to be accepting any pats on the back for a noble effort, or any of the rubbish that you are going to get from supporters and friends, because ultimately we're in this game to win—and ultimately you win if you put in four quarters of hard, tough footy, and we let ourselves down when it counted the most."



THE DAY IAN ROBSON LEFT

Much later, **Jeff Kennett** claimed credit for engineering the departure by encouraging Essendon president Ray Horsburgh to interview Robson for the position being vacated by long-time Bomber administrator Peter Jackson, and he took perverse pleasure in witnessing Robson break the news to the coach. He recalled the moment: "Well, in about half a second, 'Clarko' exploded verbally, calling him a traitor and everything under the sun. It was wonderful. I just sat back. I loved every minute. And then one of the other guys who was close to Ian tried to defend him and Clarko turned on him and said, 'The last time you were seen was when your boots were hanging out of his arse!' It was just glorious."



“Alastair has an intense loyalty streak, as intense as I’ve ever seen in anyone. He has always stood up very strongly for his playing group or coaches or family or staff. If he feels they are under threat, his natural instinct is to protect them.”

MARK EVANS, GENERAL MANAGER
FOOTBALL OPERATIONS AT HAWTHORN
FOOTBALL CLUB (2004-2013)

WHEN MATTHEW LLOYD PUT BRAD SEWELL INTO SPACE

As **Mark Evans**, who became the AFL’s general manager of football operations in 2013, expressed it, “Alastair has an intense loyalty streak, as intense as I’ve ever seen in anyone. He has always stood up very strongly for his playing group or coaches or family or staff. If he feels they are under threat, his natural instinct is to protect them. So, as he came down to the boundary after the game and he’s looking at Max Bailey and he’s looking at Brad Sewell, his first instinct is to be the protector of these guys.

“Alastair creates a strong feeling that when you’re with us, part of us, part of our family, we’ll protect you to the end and I have to admire how that has permeated through the playing group. They know that the coach is in their corner.”

Among those who watched from the stands that day was **John Kennedy senior**, who took no exception to Clarkson’s behaviour whatsoever. “I was het up that day too!” he said. “I’d have gone for Lloyd, really gone for him. And, if I, at my age, felt like that, I didn’t blame him at all.”

JOSH KENNEDY GOES TO SYDNEY

John Kennedy senior has no criticism of the club or the coach. “Alastair was very honest and open,” he says.

“He told Josh, ‘You are in our first 27, but not necessarily in our first 22.’ He couldn’t say what Sydney was saying, what ‘Roosy’ (Swans coach Paul Roos) was saying: ‘We want you there on the ball.’ And Hawthorn had Jordan Lewis, Brad Sewell, Sam Mitchell. No! The three of them were well ahead of Josh. And I reckon it was very honest of Alastair. He was very straight with him.”

YABBY JEANS NEEDS COMPANY

Then, in mid-2010, **Peter Knights** received a call from **Allan Jeans** he would never forget. “He rang me at home and said Mary was struggling and he wasn’t 100 per cent. He was really worried for Mary, not for himself,” said Knights. “He was coming to the realisation that his health was deteriorating and he was worried about whether he could look after Mary. And he said, ‘Knightsy, remember when we went out and opened that aged-care facility at Lynbrook?’”

Knights, who manages the coterie groups at Hawthorn, rang Peter McKenzie, who built, owns and runs the centre, called Embracia at Lynbrook, on the outskirts of the burgeoning semi-rural suburb of Cranbourne. Within weeks, Allan and **Mary Jeans** had settled into a new home in the Jeans wing, but it wasn’t long before Jeans alerted Knights to the one thing that he was lacking: the company of males, especially those who had an interest in football. “I’m starved for male company,” Jeans told him. “I go to dinner and 90 per cent of the residents are female.” “That’s when I became a go-between,” said Knights, who spread the word to former players and passed on an invitation from Jeans to Alastair Clarkson and Mark Evans to visit if they had the time.

Yabby’s philosophy and turn of phrase became regular presences in Clarkson’s pre-match address to players, invariably with attribution. One of the players affected was **Jarryd Roughead**, who recalled: “I went out with **Bud (Franklin)** a couple of times and we didn’t know too much about (Jeans) growing up because he was just before our time, but to see how passionate he was and the ideas that he had for us was pretty special.

“He’d ask us questions about what we thought about this or that and half the time we’d look back with blank faces, not knowing where he was going, and then we’d think about it and go, ‘He’s probably right’. What struck us most was just how passionate he was, in terms of how much he loved the game and not only that, us as well. You could see how much he cared for the boys and wanted us to get better. He’d tell Clarko things more than us because Clarko would know how to relay it on to us.”



SWITCHING CAPTAINS

The approach Hawthorn undertook to choose a successor for **Richie Vandenberg** in 2007 was for the players to elect a leadership group, who would then select the captain. When the vote of the leadership group was evenly split between **Hodge** and **Mitchell**, Clarkson expanded the number of players to 10. They met at Mitchell’s home and once again the vote was tied five-all. It was then that the idea of co-captains was put to Kennett, who considered the proposition the equivalent of having two state premiers, or co-prime ministers, and not something Hawthorn would ever entertain. “It’s not going to happen,” he replied, prompting the discussion that took place between Clarkson, Mitchell and Hodge at Kennett’s office. Hodge volunteered that Mitchell was more mature and better prepared to take on the role at that time, and Mitchell, with Clarkson’s approval, accepted on the implicit understanding that there would be a handover at some point, when Hodge was ready. It was Hawthorn’s version of the Kirribilli pact of 1998 that saw Bob Hawke agree to hand the prime ministership over to Paul Keating—except that no external witnesses were involved and unlike Hawke’s commitment, this deal was honoured.

LOSING IN 2012

"I don't want us sooking and sulking and not holding our heads up high and not supporting one another over the next few weeks," **Clarkson** told them, "because we've just got to pick up the pieces and go again. It's as simple as that. It's hard. **Yabby (Allan Jeans)** went to nine of them and he only saluted four times. Five times he felt just like we're feeling now.

"But if you want to be a heavyweight, and you want to get to the end of September, you've got to be prepared to put up with some pain. Otherwise, (you) just float along in the bottom eight, avoid massive disappointment like now, but never give yourselves the chance to genuinely compete, and find out about yourself.

"Far better to be one of two heavyweights having a crack. One doesn't win all the time. We're the unfortunate loser now and we dig deep, but it's not the end of the world."

BEATING GEELONG

Shaun Burgoyne, Hawthorn's most experienced finals performer on the ground—this was his 23rd final, and seventh preliminary final—was similarly upbeat. "The guys were confident," he said. "We touched on how we were the best last-quarter team in the comp and we could finish full of run. That's exactly what I was thinking: 'We can run over these guys and win the game from here.'"

The confidence of head fitness coach **Andrew Russell** was based on the resilience the group had displayed in the home and away season and their ability to find ways to win when an opponent had the ascendancy. As Clarkson addressed the players, Russell scanned their faces and felt reassured. "I thought at least 60 to 70 per cent (of them) believe we can still win this game—and that's all we needed."

Ben Stratton intercepted two long kicks from Mitch Duncan in defence with fine marks, the second much more desperate and difficult than the first—touches of Leo Barry in the 2005 Grand Final.

"I thought I had to take it. Otherwise they were out the back," he explained.

"I'd had a pretty ordinary first three quarters and I just remember, during the year, Clarko and Andrew Russell and all the coaches saying you can be having a shit game, or shit quarters, but stay in the game, keep plugging away, you're never out of it.

"That helped me immensely because I was able to have an impact in the last quarter and do some things that helped the team and play a part of it in the end—and I hadn't done that for the first three quarters.

"Maybe in my first couple of years I probably would have folded and accepted that I'd had a shit day."



"Far better to be one of two heavyweights having a crack. One doesn't win all the time. We're the unfortunate loser now and we dig deep, but it's not the end of the world"

ALASTAIR CLARKSON,
AFTER THE 2012
GRAND FINAL LOSS



MITCHELL V CROWLEY

Mitchell's task was to take Crowley into the giant ruckman's 'hit zone' at stoppages and so restrict the ability of Freo's other on-ballers, Nat Fyfe, Michael Barlow and David Mundy, to get clean possessions and easy exits. He performed it with cool efficiency, laying almost as many tackles as he won kicks and having a positive impact in some 30 contests without actually getting the ball.

PRE-GAME, GRAND FINAL 2013

The coach continued, warming to his year-long theme: "We learned a lot of lessons last year, and one of them is that suffering is the pathway to success. And that's what we had to go through. We suffered last year, but we didn't come and play our best footy.

"Now, we've got ourselves into a position where we've got a chance, but to a man, we have to sacrifice for one another and we have to go with everything we've got, understanding full well that this game isn't going to go our way all day. It's going to ebb and flow—and hang in there and persevere and back yourself and back your teammate and back your structure and we'll be OK."

The tone was somehow restrained and the message was simple: that nothing more was expected of the team than what they had delivered all year. "It was a relaxed feeling in the room," recalled **Luke Hodge**. "It felt like another game. It didn't feel like a Grand Final until you ran out."

POST-GAME, GRAND FINAL 2013

There was no real address from the elated and relieved **Clarkson**, just an introduction. "Boys, it's a great feeling. We missed out by a point on the development squad winning the flag, Box Hill won the (VFL) flag, Hawthorn won the (AFL) flag. What a statement that makes about our club," he said.

For the premiership players, the challenge could be summed up in a single phrase used by Fagan at the AGM: to stay hungry and humble. Their motivation was multilayered: to win again for themselves and the club and the supporters. The Hawks were one of four clubs to have won three flags since the Victorian Football League became the Australian Football League in 1990 (the others were Geelong, Brisbane and West Coast). A fourth would put them in a category of their own.