

KEVIN BARTLETT'S STORY

The year I quit the Tigers

In an excerpt from his new book, Richmond legend Kevin Bartlett explains how close he came to leaving Tigerland.

In 1977, I won the best and fairest for the fifth and final time. By doing so, I equalled the record of the great Jack Dyer. And I also finished runner-up in the Brownlow Medal. We finished fourth that year, losing to North Melbourne in the first semi-final.

The next year, the team finished seventh and missed the finals, which resulted in coach Barry Richardson getting sacked and Tony Jewell taking over. I was appointed captain in 1979 and all should have been well.

Yet the gloss was taken off the appointment during the season when I discovered that, after 14 years, I was no longer in favour to be chosen rover.

By the middle of the season, when I picked up the newspaper, I was seeing my name listed on the half-forward flank. And there was no subterfuge back in 1979; the way the teams were picked in the paper was the way they lined up.

It wasn't until I was named as half-forward flank in the paper for the round 11 clash against Essendon at Waverley that I discovered I was no longer roving for Richmond.

Back then, the biggest sports journalist in Melbourne was Rob Astbury. He was a television reporter and the news-breaker in



MAGPIE DREAMING: This photo was taken on the eve of the 1980 finals series. It was the closest Kevin Bartlett got to becoming a Magpie.



SHOCK HEADLINE: Bartlett's displeasure with the Tigers became public.

football. And as I was walking to that game through the carpark, he said to me, "I'm told that this is your last game for the Richmond Football Club".

I was staggered because no one had ever said that, and here I was, the captain of the club. I had no doubt Rob would not have said anything like that without good sources to back it up.

So I found myself taking those comments into the game and they certainly helped motivate me to play well. I kicked four goals that afternoon and was named in the best. And, to this day, I am pretty certain if I had played poorly against the Bombers that day, then I more than likely would have been told that my career was finished.

I believe the club had made up its mind and had decided I was finished as a footballer.

Their plan was to leave me on the half-forward flank, let me become disillusioned, not get a kick, and then say goodbye to me. This is why I always hold a special place for Waverley Park, because it actually saved my career.

I played the rest of the season at half-forward with reasonable success, but after the last game, I decided to resign as captain

because I genuinely felt the club had lost confidence in me as a player.

The club had tried to create a set of circumstances that would lead to me not playing well and leave me no alternative but to retire.

I informed the club of my decision shortly after the end of the season. I remember saying, "I am resigning as captain and as a player because I believe there are people at this club who are conspiring against me and therefore, to halt any of the problem whatsoever, I will resign, move on and play elsewhere because I feel I can play for another three years."

I think that approach surprised them, because I don't think they anticipated that sort of thinking and I don't think they wanted me to move to another

club. It wouldn't have been a good look for Richmond to have the club's games record-holder, a four-time premiership player and five-time best and fairest suddenly bobbing up to play for another club.

During this time of uncertainty, there was no shortage of suitors.

My old teammate Ian Stewart wanted me to come to South Melbourne where he was coach, while Barry Davis was coaching Essendon and wanted me to come to Windy Hill. At Collingwood, I met with Tom Hafey, then the Magpies' coach, and his long-time assistant Ron Richards, but Tommy was a bit torn about it all.

He said, "I don't think I could handle taking you away from Richmond."

I weighed up all the offers. I saw Essendon as a club that could give me the opportunities I wanted and met with Dons committeeman Alan McGillivray. I liked what I heard and signed a letter of agreement that I would play for the Bombers.

I told Tommy the news, but he thought it was the wrong thing to do. So he swayed me to

initiate a truce with the Tigers through Michael Green, my great friend and solicitor.

Even though I did sign the letter of agreement with Essendon, deep down, if I were to leave Richmond, I would have gone only to Collingwood with Tom Hafey. But when Tommy told me he felt uncomfortable about the potential move, I had to have a rethink.

As part of the negotiations, the club offered me back the captaincy. But I rejected that because I didn't think at that stage Richmond particularly cared who was captain. Plus, I never wanted anyone to think that I came back just so I could retain the captaincy.

In the end, it was the counsel of my close friend Tom Hafey that swayed me back to Tigerland. He was right when he told me, "It would be fantastic for you to finish your career at the one club."

KB: A LIFE IN FOOTBALL (SLATTERY MEDIA GROUP, \$65 RRP) CAN BE ORDERED VIA FOOTYBOOKCLUB.COM



More records fall in blowouts

» Several scoring records at both ends of the spectrum were set last weekend.

Geelong backed up its record-breaking 186-point win over Melbourne in round 19 with a 150-point victory over the Gold Coast at Skilled Stadium last Saturday.

It was the first time in history a team has won two games in a row by 150 points or more. In six games at Skilled Stadium in 2011, Geelong's average winning margin is 99 points.

Last Saturday night, Collingwood's thumping 138-point win over Port Adelaide at AAMI Stadium set more records, but none the Power will look back on fondly.

Port Adelaide's final score of 3.3 (21) was its lowest in history. Its previous lowest was 3.12 (30) against Richmond in round 10 last season.

The losing margin was also the club's greatest, passing the 119-point defeat against Geelong in the 2007 Grand Final, and its half-time and three-quarter time scores—1.2 (8) and 2.2 (14)—were also new lows.

The Magpies also set a new mark, with the final margin the highest by any visiting team at AAMI Stadium.

It was Collingwood's first win by more than 20 goals since round four of 1979, when it defeated St Kilda by 178 points.

Port Adelaide's three lowest AFL scores

3.3 (21) v Collingwood, Rd 20, 2011 at AAMI Stadium

3.12 (30) v Richmond, Rd 10, 2010 at AAMI Stadium

5.6 (36) v St Kilda, Rd 5, 2009 at AAMI Stadium

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