



Review Article

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# Fluid Post-Modern Neo-Tribes: A Case Study of the West Perth Cheer Squad (Australian Rules Football), 1984-1986



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## Abstract

In this article I apply Armstrong's anthropological approach to soccer hooliganism studies to our 20-member West Perth unofficial cheer squad (hard-core supporter group) of 1984-86 (Australian Rules football's WAFL competition). I find that the anthropological approach is able to explain many aspects of our cheer squad's culture and members' behaviours including the quick disintegration of the cheer squad early in the 1986 season without anyone officially ending it. Theoretically Marsh's definition of "aggro" as "the illusion of violence" seems to almost perfectly describe and explain the tough posturing but generally peaceable behaviour of our West Perth cheer squad. It also well explains our group members' partly sub-consciously adopted submissive attitude towards the Swan Districts' supporters at Bassendean Oval in 1985 and their response to that submission (and their team's win) which was to quietly walk away, their job done. They enforced the total authority of Swan Districts' fans over every square-centimetre of Bassendean Oval without a punch being thrown.

**Keywords:** Aggro; Australian Rules football; Australian Rules football cheer squads; Football hooliganism; Illusion of violence; Neo-tribes; Perth history; Sports history; Western Australian football; Western Australian history

**Abbreviations:** WAFL: Western Australian Football League; VFL: Victorian Football League; AFL: Australian Football League; NSL: National Soccer League; BBB: Bad Blue Boys; VPL: Victorian Premier League; SDFC: Swan Districts Football Club; WPFC: West Perth Football Club; WAFC: Western Australian Football Commission; WAFL: Western Australian Football League

## Introduction

### General Introduction

In this article I apply Gary Armstrong's [1] anthropological approach to soccer (i.e. association football) hooliganism studies to our 20-person West Perth cheer squad (hard-core supporter group) of 1984-86 (Australian Rules football's WAFL competition). I find that the anthropological approach is able to explain many aspects of our cheer squad's culture and members' behaviours including the quick disintegration of the cheer squad early in the 1986 season without anyone officially ending it. However, our group members did not adjust their commitment downwards during the cheer squad's years of action; most members attended all home-and-away matches during May 1984 - March 1986.

West Perth FC has been a foundation member of the Perth-based Western Australian Football League (WAFL) competition since 1885. However, the WAFL was reduced to second-tier

status when the newly-formed Perth-based West Coast Eagles club entered the expanded Victorian Football League (VFL) (now Australian Football League (AFL)) in time for the 1987 season [2]. The VFL/AFL now operates as a de facto national premier league (first division). As in American professional sport, there is no promotion to or relegation from the VFL/AFL to the various second-tier leagues based in each of the major cities. During the twentieth century, up to 1982, the VFL/AFL was based solely in the state of Victoria (and 11 of its then 12 clubs were based in the city of Melbourne).

A cheer squad (an Australian Rules football term) is a semi-organized group of hard-core supporters (comprising typically but not always a male teenager majority) which sits in the same strategic place at home matches and which supports the team through chants, songs, flags, and banners<sup>1</sup>. However, traditionally, cheer squads did not sing or chant continuously

<sup>1</sup>Some of these cheer squads (such as the cheer squad at WAFL club East Perth from 1982-88, according to David Lockhart) were club-sponsored and financed (source for information on East Perth Cheer Squad: comment by David Lockhart on Lost WAFL Facebook page, 4 December 2013). Others, such as our West Perth Cheer Squad, were unofficial only and had no official connection to the football club.

but only at significant moments in the match such as when the team runs out on to the field and after goals (which are far more numerous in Australian Rules than in soccer). Unlike soccer ultras, the groups generally did not stand in circles singing and chanting at off-stadium locations such as pubs or railway stations. This ultras-style behaviour may be infiltrating cheer squad culture so we must be careful to restrict ourselves in this article to discussing the cheer squads of the eighties. (Since 1989 the national soccer league has been played in summer so it is possible and not uncommon for supporters to support an Australian Rules club and a soccer club and the supporters of both sports are likely to be the ones who have been bringing ultras' culture into Australian Rules. For example, leading members of the South Fremantle Cheer Squad (WAFL), formed 2002, also attend Perth Glory soccer matches in the summer.) A cheer squad typically attends some or all away matches, and usually sits in a humble location at away venues (near the entrance which is closest to the train station for example) and rarely tries to take over the home cheer squad's territory<sup>2</sup>. Australian Rules football cheer squads should *not* be confused with the cheer squads of American Football which are, obviously, completely different.

The dominant culture at Melbourne- and Adelaide-based cheer squads, since the formation of the first cheer squad at VFL/AFL club Richmond in 1959 [3], has included an important fraternal ethos among rival cheer squad members especially away from the grounds. The cheer squads took on some of the "illusion of violence" [4] or tough-guy posturing from British and European soccer hooligans and ultras. However, this was more in terms of style and posturing; cheer squads rarely sought out or engaged in actual violent actions. Another influence on the cheer squads arguably was the ultras groups formed by Australian soccer supporters from European ethnic immigrant backgrounds including those connected to clubs such as Melbourne Croatia, South Melbourne Hellas, Sydney Croatia, and Sydney Olympic [5].

### Aim

The aim of this article is to apply Armstrong's theory of fluid "post-modern" "neo-tribes" [1] to our West Perth cheer squad 1984-86 and draw appropriate theoretically-informed conclusions from this application. We also use Peter Marsh's concept of "aggro" as the "illusion of violence" [4] which suggests that, in order to gain and demonstrate control over territory and resources, rival groups engage in symbolic behaviours (advances and retreats) which more often than not involve only mild violence or no violence at all. If group self-respect, integrity, and territorial control can be achieved without actual violence then, as the theory goes, so much the better.

### Motivations

It is important to study the behaviours and cultures of Australian Rules football hard-core supporters and cheer squads

as this has been an under-researched area. Much of what we do know to date comes largely from personal memories and anecdotes and from occasional comments and digressions in Australian Rules football history books of various kinds [6].

## Background

### General Background

The three largest population centres where Australian Rules football is the most popular winter sport are Melbourne, Adelaide, and Perth. Traditionally the Melbourne-based VFL/AFL competition had and has the best football, the largest crowds, and the most passionate supporters compared to the local competitions based in the other two cities (the SANFL in Adelaide and the WAFL in Perth). Football supporter culture has typically diffused from Melbourne to Adelaide (654kilometres to the west) and, only to a much lesser extent and at a slower rate, from these two centres to Perth. Slow diffusion to Perth is largely due to distance: Perth is located far away on the country's west coast 2,131kilometres from Adelaide and 2,721kilometres from Melbourne. Until recently working-class and lower middle-class people rarely travelled from Perth to Melbourne but travel from Adelaide to Melbourne was much more common due to the fact that it was within easy over-night driving distance. As a result seventies' and eighties' football supporter culture diffused faster and to a greater extent from Melbourne to Adelaide than from these two cities to Perth.

In the peak cheer squad years of the VFL/AFL in the seventies and eighties, when it was a Melbourne suburban competition plus Geelong FC, cheer squad members from various clubs would catch up with each other after games at Flinders Street Station and shout across station platforms the scores from their respective grounds. There was also a place called Classic Cafe in Melbourne city-centre where cheer squad members congregated and interacted on Saturday nights after the regular Saturday afternoon home-and-away games [6]. If anything, cheer squad members have been less violent than ordinary supporters of Australian Rules' clubs. A distinction has been made between the inner and outer cheer squads at the popular Collingwood club where the inner cheer squad was the approved membership that adhered to fraternal cheer squad ethics whereas the outer cheer squad was the hooligan element not under the restraining influence of cheer squad leaders. However, I argue that, despite this, the "illusion of violence" has always been important, to some extent, for Melbourne- and Adelaide-based cheer squads.

The fraternal Melbourne- and Adelaide-based cheer squad culture merged with the outwardly more aggressive English soccer hooligan culture, which regularly appeared on Australian TV news reports, to create the ethos of groups such as our West Perth Cheer Squad. Growing up as teenagers in Australia in the eighties we all saw the TV news reports of soccer hooligan violence coming out of the UK and, being eager to prove our

<sup>2</sup>Australian Rules football (including the WAFL) has never had mandatory segregation of fans into different areas of a stadium on match-days.

credentials, we adopted some of their tough-guy posturing or “illusion of violence” [4]; the influence was there definitely at the subconscious level if not at the conscious level. So to say that Australian Rules football crowds and soccer crowds are unrelated topics is simply nonsense. However, we never initiated violence and we were only once seriously threatened by it (at Bassendean Oval). The events of that particular day will be presented and analysed in the Results sections of this article.

The leading cheer squads in WAFL (Perth-based) football in 1984-86 were Perth Demons, Claremont, Subiaco, West Perth, and East Perth, probably in that order or with West Perth as third. None of the remaining three WAFL clubs had semi-organized cheer squads of any type as far as key people were aware. Perth and Claremont might have had 20-30 people on a good day, and our West Perth group had a stable core of 15-20. By the second half of our existence we had around 15 large red-and-blue flags or one flag per core member.

West Perth in fact had three cheer squads during the 1984-86 periods:

- a) Fat Pam (Pam Hynsen)’s cheer squad, which disbanded at the end of the 1983 season but continued to still make the banners the players ran through before the games;
- b) Our unofficial group situated behind the northern-end goals, which replaced Fat Pam’s group which had formerly used that location; and
- c) The Grandstand Falcons, a group of older guys then in their twenties who sat at the top of the Leederville Oval grandstand and sang songs (but had no flags or floggers).

The existence of three supporter groups shows the passion and commitment of grassroots supporters for many of the WAFL clubs during the eighties when average match attendances for home-and-away fixtures were around seven to eight thousand.

At one Subiaco Oval (neutral-venue) game, our cheer squad sat in front of the Grandstand Falcons with a third section of seats in front of our cheer squad reserved for our flags and banners. (Our group never took floggers to away games but instead we stored them in the West Perth FC club facilities at Leederville Oval.) Altogether there would have been over 50 people there that day across both groups combined. The noise the combined group made under the grandstand roof, on the second- (middle-) tier of the three-tier stand behind the Fremantle-end goals, was magnificent when magnified by the echoes. We sang the Grandstand Falcons’ powerful song “This Time, We’ll Get It Right<sup>3</sup> about England’s 1982 World Cup hopes (with England changed to West Perth and the “white” dropped from “red, white, and blue”). This song summed up perfectly people’s emotions

at the time because it had been a decade since West Perth had last won a premiership [7] and the supporters’ hopes had been dashed on many an occasion. In hindsight, this was our cheer squad’s greatest day.

The largest and best organized cheer squad was Perth Football Club’s under the leadership of a very warm, cheerful, and sophisticated “metro-sexual” guy with blond-rinse hair called Nick. Nick brought the disciplined and fraternal Melbourne-based (VFL/AFL) cheer squad culture and ethics over to the Perth Football Club. This cheer squad had existed since at least 1981. To this day the wooden bench seats behind the northern- or city-end goals at Lathlain Park, Perth’s home ground, are painted red-and-black, a permanent reminder of the days (and years) when Nick’s passionate cheer squad occupied those benches.

The Claremont cheer squad was probably similarly influenced by the Melbourne-based cheer squads since one of its core members wore a Melbourne-style duffel coat with club name and favourite player name and number (Peter 15 Jamieson) emblazoned on the back in big iron-on lettering. The duffel-coat culture never caught on in Perth as, unlike in Adelaide, few school-aged Perth-based supporters then made trips to Melbourne or Adelaide to watch VFL/AFL or SANFL games, and the only places to see the duffel-coat culture were Melbourne and Adelaide. Furthermore, the Perth winter is milder and too hot for duffel coats.

These duffel coats were excellent for standing on the terraces in the rain on Saturday afternoons in Melbourne because the rain-soaked coats could simply be left out to dry and would be wearable one week later. It was common in 1982 to see these duffel-coats with team and player names ironed on and pin-on player badges being worn on the streets by teenagers on weekdays in the city-centre. However, by 1986, the coats were mostly only being worn at games while by the nineties they had disappeared from the stadiums as well. All-seater stadiums with covered roof sections had made them redundant.

### Fat Pam’s West Perth Cheer Squad (Disbanded 1983)

I had become aware, early in the 1984 season that the earlier famed West Perth Cheer Squad, which had congregated behind the northern-end goals at Leederville for many years, had quit completely at the end of 1983. This cheer squad was interesting as unlike most cheer squads in Australian Rules’ history in Melbourne, Adelaide, and Perth it was dominated by middle-aged females and young children. The legendary leader of this group was a woman known by the woefully politically incorrect moniker of “Fat Pam” (real name: Pam Hynsen)<sup>4</sup>. The leading women used to stand upright on the last row of wooden benches

<sup>3</sup>See: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2w3\\_PZh0IR4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2w3_PZh0IR4) [accessed 14 September 2017].

<sup>4</sup>Pam’s family name was supplied many years later in a comment post by long-term cheer squad member David Barr on the Facebook page *Lost WAFL* on 21 September 2017. This comment post appears to have been deleted.

behind the northern-end goals<sup>5</sup>. Their cheer squad was large, committed, and dedicated; it had a huge collection of flags and floggers<sup>6</sup>. This group had operated for a number of years and was well known and respected. I sat near the group at the northern-end of East Fremantle Oval for an East Fremantle versus West Perth match in Round 17 (8 August) 1981<sup>7</sup>.

However, with Fat Pam's cheer squad disbanded, I sensed a gap and an opportunity. As far as I was aware, in May 1984, Fat Pam's group continued to make the banners that the players ran through at the start of each game (they may still make these banners today), and our group never attempted to get involved in this activity, mostly out of respect for Fat Pam's group which had been there long before it. The northern-end at Leederville Oval in 1984 was strangely quiet, empty, and barren, now devoid of West Perth flags and floggers on home match days. I felt that the team would be inspired by a vocal group of home supporters, with a colourful red-and-blue visual presence, at the northern-end of Leederville. A Melbourne Knights' soccer supporter puts forward her view (below) that her team has been inspired and encouraged on occasion by the vociferous, noisy, and colourful support of the club's hooligan firm Melbourne Croatia Fans or MCF:

"From what I can gather, the MCF is largely made up of young men who are passionate about their club, its heritage and its importance to the Croatian community. They are loyally devoted to their team and will often travel great distances in order to show their support. The songs, chants and banners have (according to the players) been known to lift our team in crucial moments during the match"<sup>8</sup>.

I was inspired to set up a new unofficial cheer squad to replace Fat Pam's group behind the northern-end goals at home matches and to travel to select away games. I expected that the demographics of my new group would be totally different to Fat Pam's group but I hoped that our members would show the same loyalty, dedication, commitment, and spirit. The new cheer squad would have a lot to live up to.

### **West Perth versus South Fremantle, Leederville Oval, Round 6 (5 May), 1984**

My high-school friend Mike B (also a West Perth supporter) was willing and interested in the cheer squad idea so, on Saturday 5 May 1984, we took the Number 105 bus from Booragoon into

Perth city-centre, walked two blocks from St George's Terrace to Barrack Street (just north of Murray Street), and then caught the 1.15pm Number 15 bus to Glendalough. Mike B and I then alighted near the ground along the Oxford Street cappuccino strip, not far from the corner with Vincent Street. I am fairly sure that Mike B and I already had two large red-and-blue homemade flags on this day. On this day Mike B and I both wore long-sleeved West Perth replica playing jerseys. Although these were not the height of fashion even in the mid-eighties Mike B and I were both proud to show off our club loyalties.

Contemporaneous newspaper reports confirm that this match was the thrilling home draw against South Fremantle on 5 May 1984 described by Atkinson [7] in his West Perth FC official history book. Atkinson recounts that the slender Aboriginal forward flanker Ron Davis<sup>9</sup> kicked two goals out of three for West Perth in the last five minutes to draw the game with only 15 seconds remaining. The final score was: West Perth 15.15 (105) drew South Fremantle 16.9 (105) (source: match scores are taken from *ibid.*, p. 334; *The West Australian*, Monday, 7 May, 1984, p. 81) and the official attendance was 7,790 (source: WAFL Online website). I certainly do remember a joyous mood that day commensurate with an exciting come-from-behind draw. It was the perfect on-field start to begin the cheer squad era. It was the first drawn match in the WAFL since 20 April 1974.

Mike B and I must have exerted an aura of charm and authenticity on this day as a number of people came up to us, introduced themselves, and stayed for the rest of the afternoon including Courtney; Rohan H; and Mark T aka "Thommo". Some of these people, including the three names mentioned, would go on to become core members of the cheer squad.

### **Courtney, 14-years-old, from Carine, friend of Rohan and Thommo**

Blond 14-year-old Courtney was a designer dresser in the manner of the English "soccer casuals" of the eighties. He was very interested in fashion. I think that he also had a long-sleeved West Perth replica jersey but, other than that somewhat unfashionable item of clothing, he always wore colourful vee-neck woollen jumpers (pullovers); bulky cargo shorts (even on the coldest days); and navy deck shoes without socks. Courtney came from a middle-class or upper middle-class family suburb in WPFC's geographic district<sup>10</sup>. It was most likely Carine which is today part of Subiaco FC's recruiting zone<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> The word "goals" is used in plural form in Australian Rules football culture because the goals are made up of four separate vertical posts.

<sup>6</sup> Fat Pam's cheer squad can be seen on the video-clip of the 7 May 1983 West Perth versus Subiaco game recently posted to YouTube.com. The cheer squad is at far left of screen (behind the Leederville Oval northern-end goals). To find this video search YouTube for "West Perth v Subiaco 1983" or simply copy-paste the following link into your browser: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gmZMzTr7CA&feature=related> [accessed 7 August 2011].

<sup>7</sup> Two pictures of Fat Pam's WPFC cheer squad at East Fremantle Oval on 8 August 1981 can be viewed at the following link: <http://wafgoldenera.blogspot.com/2013/12/picture-gallery-fat-pams-west-perth.html> [accessed 5 December 2013].

<sup>8</sup> Melbourne Knights' supporter, personal e-mail communication to the author dated 23 August 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Ron (Ronald Brian) Davis (DOB 11/8/1963) played 13 senior games for West Perth in 1984-85 and kicked 22 goals (Atkinson, 2008, p. 354).

<sup>10</sup> The creation of allocated zones within the metropolitan area for each WAFL club was introduced c. 1970.

<sup>11</sup> For the location of the suburb Carine within Subiaco FC's recruiting zone as at 2009 see the metropolitan area maps at the following link: <https://www.bigfooty.com/forum/threads/wafl-zoning-and-expansion.1085307/> [accessed 16 February 2018].

**Rohan H, 14-years, from Carine, Courtney's Friend:** Brown-haired, 14-year-old Rohan H was a slender, quiet lad who stuck close to Courtney. They were school-friends in the northern suburbs and both were committed to the group from the first match. I can't say that I ever got to know Rohan well. His manner was aloof and unapproachable, but this was not due to arrogance; more likely it was because of shyness and caution. Rohan was very much an introvert but he showed his commitment to the group by his regular attendance for two years. Courtney and Rohan were together the "middle-class" and the relatively more self-controlled sub-gang within the core but they also enjoyed the more boisterous chants and songs.

**Mark T aka "Thommo", 14-Years-Old, "Floater" / Non-Aligned, Courtney's Junior Football Friend:** The next character I will introduce to readers is the redhead "Thommo", always known to the group members by the nickname of "Thommo" which he brought into the group from his home-suburb and high-school. Group members did coin some nicknames within the group. "Half" for the eight-year-old Michael was the best and most famous of these. However, most of the nicknames people naturally brought into the group from outside and it were more authentic and simpler to use these pre-existing names than to invent new ones.

The senior Thommo's character was complex. He was, like many of the others, a working-class rebel and a very loyal and tough person. He could chat calmly and intelligently with people, but, if he felt that he was being disrespected, then he would change in an instant, and give that person a swift rebuke and stinging defence of himself and of his arguments. In that way people learned to respect him and be slightly wary of his reactions although you could also praise and respect him for his mild-mannered nature, self-control, and good humour. He was great for joking and laughter and he also enjoyed getting analytical at times about West Perth's players and performances.

Another point to note is that Thommo knew Courtney through junior football although they were not from the same high-school. Thommo then became an important natural link between the various sub-gangs in the group. His background, dressing, and style were more proletarian than those of the "Carine group", Courtney and Rohan. However, the link between Thommo and "the Carine group" was important and a part of the glue that reinforced trust and goodwill especially in those early weeks in 1984 when group members did not know each other well.

Cheer squad members all used to stay behind after games until well after darkness on the playing surface of Leederville Oval and away venues to kick footballs amongst themselves. Thommo, in these encounters, was a fast, courageous, and skilful footballer. He would contest marks against the immobile rock that was Peter "PA" Brennan (family name changed) who was six-foot-two and a veritable 18-year-old man mountain. PA would stand in one place to mark and kick whilst Thommo and the

others would use their speed and skill to steal the marks from PA, either in front or to the side of him, or else they would pick up the loose balls that P.A. spilled. I can remember Thommo's habitual long-sleeved checked flannel shirts, later made famous in the grunge music era of the early-nineties, and how he would always have a cigarette packet in his chest pocket which would often fall to the ground whilst he was running at or with the football. He would then quickly run back to recover his cigarette packet from the ground in order to beat any potential "thieves". Group members stuck with their own group in these football games, and would never formally join in with strangers. This is perhaps further evidence for the proposition that the cheer squad was a "group-for-itself" (see Results section).

### **Michael aka "Half", 8-Years-Old, from Bayswater**

I now move on to mention the group's most important and famous younger member, Michael, or "Half" as the group members christened him because he was one-half the height of the other people in the group. Half was a sandy-haired eight-year-old whose parents were financial members of the West Perth Football Club. They sat in the grandstand at home games and attended all away games. They allowed Half to set his own agenda, go his own way, and make his own friends during the games as long as he did not leave the enclosed confines of the grounds. That was an era where people generally let their children roam free and people were less conscious of the threat of paedophiles. His parents were never seen by the group members but I suppose that group members viewed them as spectral support from the more respectable section of the West Perth supporter base. They attended all games home and away. Certainly they gave the group a certain amount of trust and group members did feel some obligation and responsibility regarding Half's welfare. Half was a very passionate West Perth supporter although I believe he lived in the East Perth FC geographic district in either Bayswater or Maylands.

Half joined the cheer squad for every home and away game for two years and he always joined group members on the playing surface after games for the informal kick-to-kick sessions among the group members. He was always regarded as an important part of the cheer squad and his nickname was a sign of affection. He was a carefree extrovert who liked chatting and laughing and would get very excited during significant moments of play when West Perth was doing well. At such times he would run around and climb up on to empty seats, waving his flag furiously. He would enjoy the insulting cheer squad chants and enjoy negative discussions about other teams and verbally jousting with rival fans of his own age if any of them came too close. Like every group member, he genuinely loved and admired the playing group, the team, and the club but in the innocent way you would expect of an eight-year-old. When he urinated on the oval during kick-to-kick sessions he would receive a rebuke from other members who would quickly look away!

Once I recall telephoning half's house to discuss with him tickets relating to either the Sandover Medal Night, at the now

demolished Perth Entertainment Centre in 1984, or to the first semi-final of 1985. I recall Half's father answering the phone and being very wary initially. However, when he heard that I was from "West Perth cheer squad", he totally relaxed, and he handed the phone over to Half. I arranged with Half for the buying of his ticket in conjunction with his father. Half could be quite mature in discussing things such as buying tickets to events. He certainly did not want to miss out on anything. Overall Half was an extremely interesting character and almost the cute and cheeky mascot of the cheer squad.

### **"P.A." and Dave S, 18-Years-Old and 16-Years-Old, the Balga Sub-Gang**

My personal 1984 WAFL season notes, compiled during the 1984 season, state that Peter "PA" Brennan (family name changed) (hereafter "PA") and Dave S (name changed) first joined the group for the Round 12 (23 June) 1984 match when West Perth defeated Claremont 21.10 (136) to 9.14 (68) at Subiaco Oval (source: match scores taken from Atkinson [7]). Although at that time PA and DS were regarded by group members as being the "Balga group"<sup>12</sup> DS was actually from Tuart Hill as he confirmed via a since self-deleted comment he posted on the *WAFL Golden Era* website ([wafgoldenera.blogspot.com](http://wafgoldenera.blogspot.com)) on 14 June 2013. PA and DS together made an interesting spectacle, and I do remember that it was with great interest and some anxiety that group members watched the pair walk towards us on the first day. PA was six-feet-two, stocky, and built like a country league football ruckman (or like ruckman Ron Boucher of the Swan Districts Football Club) whereas DS was much shorter and quite slim.

DS, the cheer squad's only Asian member, was an ethnic Chinese who also, from day one, wore the "uniform" of long-sleeved West Perth replica playing jersey and plain blue or black jeans (the most popular dressing style in the cheer squad). He was first seen with PA before they joined the group, and he also was associated with the "Balga group" although he came from Tuart Hill. He was also an interesting character and he had a love-hate relationship with PA that involved frequent insults directed at PA's alleged gullibility.

An interesting coincidence was that West Perth's then league-team captain and one of the club's greatest ever players was Les Fong, a Chinese-Australian who was nicknamed "Chopsticks", "Choppy" or "Chopper", and then the cheer squad had its own Chinese member in DS Perhaps Les Fong's presence at West Perth made it easier for the cheer squad members to accept DS. Their actual real names in fact rhymed and had only two different letters out of seven. Group members regarded it as interesting, symmetrical, and appropriate that the cheer squad had its own Chinese member. It meant that the West Perth senior

team had its mirror image, in terms of ethnic mix, on the other side of the playing fence.

I cannot remember DS facing any racism that was hostile from any of the cheer squad's core members but of course he may have experienced some teasing and put-downs. As with Thommo, DS had a very well-developed self-defence mechanism so people knew where they could stray verbally and where they could not. DS must have enjoyed cheer squad membership or he would not have stayed with us for two years. He was also a very faithful member even though he could never have been described as warm or even as friendly much of the time. He could also vary significantly in temperament and mood from week to week so on some weeks he might greet you warmly while on other weeks he might ignore a greeting. People had to work hard to earn his respect although he probably respected all or most of the cheer squad members, to some certain basic extent, if his continued attendance at games with the cheer squad was any indication. Of course people learned to expect DS's mood changes and to live with them.

One of DS's strong points, other than his loyalty to the cheer squad, was that he would often laugh at the humour being shared around, and his face would sometimes light up in a wide and magnificent smile. If DS wanted to discuss something serious, he would come up very close to you, remove his black sunglasses, and quietly and carefully make his points. The removal of the "sunnies" was the sign of his respect and the seriousness of his point. DS loved the actual sport of Australian Rules more than most fans; watched each game pan out with eagle eyes; and he would rebuke people who made what he considered to be unnecessary noise. Sometimes the joking would set off among five or six group members. PA would double up, bend down lower, and emit loud laughs. DS would rarely laugh but he would have this wide smile while his eyes remained intently focused on the game. These were some of the better moments of the cheer squad. DS clearly had a strong bond with PA *that appeared to pre-date the day on which PA and DS first joined the cheer squad*. The way the cheer squad worked was to honour and respect, and to some extent even to trust, these pre-existing bonds that people brought into the group from their home-suburbs and high-schools.

### **Mike C and Pete C, 16-Years-Old and 14-Years-Old, No Fixed Abode**

The brothers Mike C and Pete C were an integral part of the cheer squad from very early on. Cheer squad members knew that both had a background of reform and foster homes, but no-one ever thought that either would steal anything from the group members or anything similar. Mike C could find it hard to control his emotions, whether anger or excitement, so group

<sup>12</sup>For the location of the suburb Balga (traditionally regarded as West Perth territory) within Subiaco FC's recruiting zone as at 2009 see the metropolitan area maps at the following link: <https://www.bigfooty.com/forum/threads/wafl-zoning-and-expansion.1085307/> [accessed 16 February 2018].

members assumed his troubles with the police had related in some way to this. No-one ever asked him what his troubles had been. Pete C once said that Mike “hated pigs” and no-one found this hard to believe. Cheer squad members adopted the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy.

Mike C (16-years-old) was a scary sight to people that didn’t know him and even to some of those who did. When he got excited by the football he would walk straight up to someone in the group, stand right in front of him, and totally invade his personal space, without seemingly being aware of it. He would also do this when greeting someone for the first time each match-day. His big green eyes got fiery when excited and, in his muscle tee-shirts of the eighties and his long, thick, black, wavy hair, he cut a scary figure, and he was a vital part of the group’s tough-guy image. Under his replica West Perth playing jersey, Mike C would wear short-sleeved muscle tee-shirts, in bright colours, made famous by Australian rock stars of the era such as Cold Chisel’s Jimmy Barnes and AC/DC’s Bon Scott and Malcolm Young (6 January 1953 - 18 November 2017). Mike C. was at his most boisterous on West Perth’s good days when he would loudly and gleefully start and continue chants and songs. Mike C. was completely unafraid of opposing supporters, enjoyed loudly and conspicuously “invading” opposing team’s grounds, especially at Bassendean Oval, and he could become oblivious to place and context. Only the eight-year-old Michael aka “Half” was as openly boisterous as Mike C. When excited, both individuals would cover large amounts of space in and near the cheer squad’s chosen area, standing on and leaping over seats and waving flags and chanting.

Pete C (14-years-old) was a complete contrast to Mike C: short, quiet, softly spoken, polite, thoughtful, gentle, analytical yet equally loyal - to his brother, to the cheer squad, and to the WPFC. He was one of the people whom I most enjoyed talking to. As with his brother, his standard match-day “bogan”<sup>13</sup> attire was long-sleeved West Perth replica jersey, tight blue or black jeans, and sneakers. Both the brothers were fiercely loyal to each other and, of course, this fact and the underlying attitude behind it were very helpful to the cheer squad. Group members all valued the brothers’ loyalty, warmth, and dedication to each other, to the group, and to West Perth. The C brothers, along with Thommo and Robbie, gave the group much of its “illusion of violence” and the hooligan look and attitude. Group members knew that the C brothers had no fixed abode and lived hand-to-mouth, and the group members thrived on this knowledge; it gave the cheer squad a working-class tough-guy persona that it might otherwise have lacked.

## Literature Review

### General Introduction

Dunning et al. [8] outline the main academic approaches to soccer hooliganism studies used by academic researchers. The academic theories can be divided into: The early-dominant “figurational” or “process-sociological” approach of Dunning et al. [9,10]; the “anthropological” approach of Armstrong and Harris [1,11]; the post-modern approach of Giulianotti; the Marxist approach of Taylor, Clarke, and Hargreaves; the “ethogenic” approach of Marsh [4]; the “psychological reversal theory” approach of Kerr; and the historically sensitive / historical approaches of King and Robson [8]. We rely predominantly on Armstrong’s anthropological approach while hoping to gain insight from all of the relevant theories (including Marsh’s theory of “aggro” as being “the illusion of violence”).

### Fluid “Post-Modern” “Neo-Tribes” (Armstrong and Hughson)

Next I move on to review the ethnographic academic research on hooliganism that began in the nineties with two landmark PhD theses, one in the UK by Gary Armstrong on Sheffield United’s Blades hooligan firm (later published as *Football Hooligans – Knowing the Score*) and one in Australia by John Hughson on Sydney United’s Bad Blue Boys National Soccer league (NSL) firm from the early-nineties. Subsequent articles by Hughson [12-16] synthesize key findings of these two studies and relate some of Armstrong’s key findings to the unique context of south-west Sydney’s Bad Blue Boys (BBB), a group of Croatian-Australian teenagers who are, or perhaps were, hard-core supporters of the former NSL’s Sydney Croatia club (which was renamed Sydney United in the nineties). It should be pointed out that these “anthropological” authors have been criticized on a number of grounds by other academic researchers. Armstrong [1] has also criticized the early-dominant Leicester University School approach of Dunning and Williams.

Using the anthropological approach, Armstrong [1] focuses on the disorganized nature of Sheffield United’s Blades’ firm and the fluidity of group membership. People come to and go from the Blades according to the needs of their lives at particular stages and no-one is ever “bound” to the Blades in any sense. People connected with the Blades acknowledge that hooliganism is an acquired taste and a profession at the edge of even hard-core fan support [17]. Armstrong [1] talks in terms of fluid “post-modern” “neo-tribes” and this terminology and its associated logic is taken up by Hughson in his ethnographic study of Sydney United’s BBB.

<sup>13</sup> Bogan was a youth sub-cultural term used only in Australia. It referred to long-haired football and heavy-metal music fans who would dress in tight jeans; tight tee-shirts (usually black); long-sleeved checked flannel shirts with sleeves rolled up; and black desert boots (referred to as DBs in Perth). They usually were associated with those lower socio-economic suburbs of the major cities which were located some distance away from the ocean. (In seaside suburbs surfer culture was influential.) In the popular imagination they were often counterpoised to both surfers and British-immigrant skinheads. Their favourite bands tended to be AC/DC, Rose Tattoo, and Iron Maiden.

Armstrong [1] points out that firm allegiance is bounded and held in tight check. It is generally subordinated to ordinary relationships so that a Blades member would put to one side (or suppress) his / her hostility towards Sheffield Wednesday's "Owls" hooligans when relating in the normal way to friends, family members, and work colleagues. When Blades and Owls meet outside of match days the context is often ambiguous and people have to determine whether this is a "soccer context"<sup>14</sup> where fighting is justified or not. When groups of Blades or Owls invade each other's pubs on London Road or West Street on a Friday night this is a soccer context whereas if Blades or Owls are socializing with women or with non-hooligan mates this is not a soccer context and so soccer-related violence is unacceptable.

Significantly, neither Blades nor Owls members meet frequently outside of soccer seasons because such meetings are ambiguous and hard to interpret as being soccer-related. Armstrong [1] writes as follows: [T]he *raison d'être* of the Blades was a football [soccer] match, and a *collective* identity more or less died outside the football season, to be resurrected at the early August pre-season friendly games". On the other hand, it was *possible* for the Blades' collective identity to assert itself as dominant at gatherings outside of the soccer season such as a marriage celebration and a 30<sup>th</sup>-birthday celebration. Armstrong [1] states as follows: "Blade identity *could* therefore be automatically sustained away from the club and the match in other contexts that did not need a game of football [nor even the football season]".

Likewise, our West Perth Cheer Squad 1984-86 met only once outside of football seasons - when Mike C, his younger brother Pete C, and I arranged to attend a one-day domestic cricket match at the WACA Ground. However, this was early in the cricket season (October or November) and the planning to meet took place at the last West Perth football game. In effect, this cricket match can be seen as a special one-day extension of the football season.

Armstrong [1] ends his book by describing how Blades would sometimes in 1997 watch games at pubs close to the Bramall Lane ground partly as a protest against rising ticket prices. This is the beginning of, in Armstrong's words, "post-fan" behaviour. Armstrong's data ends in 1997 and so we do not know how the Blades are functioning in the new millennium. Generally rising season ticket prices and the rising cost of train travel have meant that the demographic of soccer support in the UK has changed while improved policing methods are a further factor in creating disinterest in hooliganism.

Armstrong [1] produces very interesting data in the form of a list compiled in April 1987 of 190 Blades with ages, occupations, and criminal record (if any) listed. He classifies these into sub-gangs and, as with our West Perth Cheer Squad (Appendix A for a

list of West Perth Cheer Squad sub-gangs), some sub-gangs might have had as few as two or three members. Larger sub-gangs which were part of the Blades included Old Lads; Drug Squad; Suicide Squad; Max's Coach Blades; Villagers; and Rotherham Blades. These last two groups were the most obviously separate since their outside-of-Sheffield locations influenced how they viewed themselves, other Blades, and other firms, and also influenced their willingness to fight. They felt that certain City Blades were too close to certain City Owls and hence sometimes not willing to confront them. Clearly, the out-of-Sheffield Blades were more idealistic and less pragmatic than the City Blades. The present article follows Armstrong's [1] example. Appendix A lists our West Perth Cheer Squad's sub-gangs and the members belonging to each.

Armstrong [1] emphasizes the casual nature of group ties and the recognition that a person was not morally bound to the firm in any way if he / she decided to give up soccer fandom or give up hooliganism as part of a natural evolution within his / her own personal life. Some people might "come out of retirement" for big matches against the Owls or if a confrontation came to them. They would often continue to go to games and London Road Friday night pub sessions but sit with non-hooligan mates or sit with Blades but not leave the pub (bar) to meet a challenge from outside.

Generally, Hughson's research of BBB supports this. He tells the humorous example of one Croatian-Australian hooligan with his girlfriend being ridiculed by the group for his love interest to the extent that over time he, and others in similar positions, disappeared to the fringes of the group or left it entirely. This hooligan was taunted by the Croatian word for "slippers" which signifies domestic bliss and a certain married lifestyle.

### Research Method

This is an ethnographic study of the West Perth Cheer Squad 1984-86 told from my viewpoint as co-founder and co-leader of this group alongside my then school-friend Mike B. It is both strength and a weakness of the research data that I was an active participant in events rather than a researcher performing typical ethnographic research *ex-ante* as a non-participant. I rely upon

- a) Personal memories backed up by;
- b) Newspaper reports from the era;
- c) Official club history books for West Perth and Swan Districts;
- d) My personal 1984 season notes which were handwritten by me during 1984;
- e) A personal interview with Mike B conducted in person in Kalgoorlie, Australia on 14 July 2011 and since then by personal online communications;

<sup>14</sup> Armstrong uses the word "football" but we prefer to use "soccer" because of the Australian setting of our data.

f) Several long online conversations during the course of calendar year 2017 with ex-cheer squad member Ben McAuliffe; and

g) Posts from older supporters on the Facebook page *Lost WAFL* and in the Facebook group *Say NO to any AFL Clubs in the WAFL*. During the cheer squad era, Ben McAuliffe was aged 13-15 and attended John XXIII (Roman Catholic) College in Perth (Appendix A).

Both Mike and Ben read through first-draft copies of my book (which is the extended version of this article) and Ben corrected three errors:

a) I had forgotten and left out his friend Rob who had attended Perth Modern SHS in the cheer squad era;

b) the Italian brothers Tony and Mario (whom Ben remembered) had attended Perth Modern SHS with Rob and not Churchlands SHS as I had earlier believed; and

c) Ben himself had attended John XXIII College rather than either Perth Modern or Churchlands (although he was a friend of Rob's at the time).

Apart from DS, who would not take up my offer to correspond with him online after I saw his post on the *WAFL Golden Era* website in 2013, most of the other cheer squad members were and are impossible to contact since I never knew their full names back in the eighties<sup>15</sup>. In the case of some of the others, their full names were and are simply too common to track them down in a city of two million people (i.e. modern-day Perth).

### Results

#### The Cheer Squad as Fluid “Post-Modern” “Neo-Tribe”

Generally speaking the West Perth Cheer Squad conforms to the idea of fluid “post-modern” “neo-tribes” where affiliations are very loose and people can easily adjust their degrees of commitment to a group and / or leave the group when their personal priorities and interests change [1,12-16]. Hughson indicates that few people remained integral parts of soccer hooligan firms in the UK beyond their early-twenties although Cass Pennant and Rob Silvester suggest that Millwall's Bushwackers firm was probably an exception in this regard [18-20]. Armstrong [1] writes that by the 1980s the “vast majority of Blades were aged between seventeen and twenty-eight”.

As with Sheffield United's Blades hooligans, people recognized that joining the West Perth Cheer Squad was totally voluntary, without any of the legal and economic ties that define workplace, marketplace, and institutional relationships. As such, the group was always careful not to “invade” another member's outside life, i.e. his life at home, school or work. Group members rarely contacted each other by telephone or met during the week

outside of Saturday match-days. Group members only met five times outside of match days during the whole 1984-86 period and only once outside of the football season (when Mike C, Pete C, and I attended a season-opening one-day domestic cricket match at the WACA Ground).

Our West Perth Cheer Squad's experiences in 1984-86 definitely lend credence to Armstrong's [1] theory about the casual nature of group ties and the fluidity of group membership with telephone calls between our members being rare; members knowing most other members only by first name and / or by nickname; members usually not knowing where other members lived or if they did know they knew only the suburb name; members meeting only five times outside of football match days and only once outside of the football season (the cricket match referred to above); and the group withering and dying of its own accord, without any fanfare, over the first few weeks of the 1986 WAFL season. However, unlike some of the Blades members in Armstrong [1], our group members did not adjust their commitment downwards during the cheer squad's years of action; most members attended all home-and-away matches during May 1984 - March 1986.

When I stopped going to games during 1986, no-one ever contacted me (and I had been co-founder and co-leader) and when I met ex-member Pete C at Fremantle Oval at a game against South Fremantle late in the 1986 home-and-away season we conversed only as friends and neither of us made any mention (if my memory serves me correctly) of the end of the cheer squad. There was only the two of us; we met by chance rather than by arrangement; and the flags and banners were long gone. We probably avoided discussing the cheer squad's end as it may have been a sad topic. Possibly people could sense my and key others' new-found lack of enthusiasm for the cheer squad in 1986 and the infectious zeal that had held the group together for two years simply saw its opposite occur: people drifted away because the igniting zeal had left. Only the zeal for West Perth and for the cheer squad had kept the cheer squad together for two full years and through two complete summer off-seasons (which are six months long in Perth). I admit that my new pre-occupation during 1986 was my university studies. In hindsight I wish that I had been slightly more pro-active in extending the life of the cheer squad.

#### “Group-for-Itself” versus “Group-in-Itself”

Regardless of his background, everyone in the cheer squad was treated and valued equally, and I believe that each group member experienced and enjoyed the camaraderie of the group. Without these positive factors each individual in the core would not have stuck with the cheer squad for two years when there were no legal, economic or moral ties to bind anyone to the group (*ibid.*). People had to enjoy sitting with the group or the group

<sup>15</sup>The leaders of the Perth and Claremont cheer squads were and are impossible to contact for the same reason.

would lose them. Everyone made the effort to create a warm and cheerful atmosphere; to welcome newcomers; and to encourage each other amidst the usual banter that you might expect in the male group situation. Everyone certainly was a dedicated West Perth supporter and the core members regarded the group as important in their lives and vital in their match-day experiences of fandom. No-one in the group was like those English soccer hooligans whom, allegedly, are not interested in the actual game or their club. The founders felt responsible for providing the group with a minimum of organization; making sure that banter was in a good spirit (especially when young members such as Half were on the receiving end); and resolving disagreements. It would be impossible to argue that continuing membership in the group was something not freely chosen by the core members for that two-year period.

Pave Jusup (aged 22 at date of interview), a leader and founding member of the MCF firm at ex-NSL soccer club Melbourne Knights, states consistent with the “loose ties” theory that the only things MCF members have in common are:

- a) Attending the games;
- b) Drugs and alcohol; and
- c) Croatian heritage (source: group interview with the author, Sunshine North, Melbourne, 11 January 2011).

However, he also suggests that the MCF is more organized than the firm at fellow Melbourne-based Croatian club, St Albans Saints (at date of interview it was a Victorian Premier League (VPL) club which is one tier below the national league). The reasoning is that the MCF is organized sufficiently to arrange bus trips interstate whereas St Albans’ supporters are not. In Pave’s words: “[t]he supporters of St Albans are not like us but they [also] do silly stuff. They are not organized like us. We are a proper group. They are just people that turn up at games and sing and drink a lot. We organize time at the pub and away trips”. Our West Perth Cheer Squad lacked the shared ethnic heritage that the MCF has and drugs and alcohol were never part of our cheer squad’s routine. However, at least after the first four or five weeks, the cheer squad was definitely, in Pave’s words, a “proper group” just like the MCF is today. As mentioned, in after-match kick-to-kick sessions and on train journeys back to the city-centre from away venues, we consistently stuck with our core members and almost never joined in with strangers or outside friends. Our group was a “group-for-itself” not just a “group-in-itself” to use these philosophical categories sometimes attributed to Karl Marx.

### **The Sub-Gangs (Refer to Appendix A for a Full Listing)**

If my memory serves me correctly, Courtney and his friend Rohan H both joined the group on the first day. Both were to form part of the core for the next two years with Courtney arguably filling a role as deputy leader, along a second rank, with Rohan H and his suburban junior football friend Thommo

(both of whom most probably joined the group on that first day as well). In our group there were tiny sub-gangs following the same pattern, but with smaller numbers, as Sheffield United’s Blades; Portsmouth’s 6.57 Crew; or the Peruvian *barras bravas* of Lima, South America [21]. The sub-gangs operated along the lines of friendships formed prior to joining the group and suburbs of residence. The sub-groups had two to five people in each, and each sub-group had a particular relationship with the joint-founders, Mike B. and me, and with the group as a whole.

Appendix A lists our sub-gangs and the members belonging to each. Courtney and Rohan (the “Carine group”) was a sub-gang, as was the “Balga group” of PA and DS. Thommo and Robbie, who joined the cheer squad only in 1985, was viewed as “floaters” or non-aligned. Because Thommo and Robbie knew each other and Thommo knew Courtney prior to anyone joining the group these two floaters were key links between the sub-gangs. People from the same district were viewed as sub-gangs since they would habitually take the same buses to and from the home games together. (After home games the Balga gang, usually joined by Robbie and perhaps Thommo Senior and his eight-year-old brother Thommo Junior, would head east on foot towards Loftus Street where they would catch their homeward bound bus northwards.)

### **The Nature of Fan Support within the Cheer Squad**

As with the Sheffield United Blades members, the core cheer squad members were all dedicated West Perth supporters and the core members regarded the group as important in their lives and in their match-day experiences of fandom. The core group members were all “traditional” and “hot” supporters based on Richard Giulianotti’s theory of the four types of soccer spectators in the global game, namely “supporters” (traditional, hot); “followers” (traditional, cool); “fans” (consumerist, hot); and “*flâneurs*” (consumerist, cool) [22,23]. Although Mike B, Courtney, and Rohan engaged in conspicuous consumption in the area of fashionable dressing this consumption did not extend to their football support which remained “traditional” and “hot”. Group members who only occasionally attended games, such as 15-year-old Robert C (brother of Mike C and Pete C and not to be confused with either Ben’s friend Rob or the floater Robbie), might be classified as followers with “traditional” yet “cool” forms of club identification.

### **Swan Districts versus West Perth, Bassendean Oval, 1985**

A trip to Bassendean Oval to play Swan Districts requires a long train journey from the Perth city-centre on the ancient Midland train line. Swan Districts is the most remote from the city-centre of the six traditional WAFL clubs which are not Fremantle-based. (Fremantle is often regarded as a separate city in its own right.) By WAFL standards Bassendean is a fairly compact ground with the outer grassy banks being less wide and less high than those at East Fremantle Oval, Leederville Oval (prior to its recent renovations) or Lathlain Park. Like a soccer

ground, all spectators are relatively close to the play. The famous old stands hug the playing arena closely and cast much of it in shadow in the late afternoons.

Since the formation of West Coast Eagles in 1987, “Swans” has had a reputation, fiercely and jealously guarded, of being the epitome of a traditional WAFL club. Bill Walker of Swan Districts was one of only two WAFL club presidents to vote against the entry of West Coast Eagles into the expanded VFL (now AFL). Even the once vibrant Midland and Guildford districts, at the centre of Swan Districts’ geographic heartland, retain a large proportion of historic buildings and they seemed to have remained somewhat shielded from the economic, social, and demographic changes that the rest of Perth has experienced. Bassendean Oval used to be a fearsome place for visiting supporters; every corner of it was “claimed” on match-days by some gang or other of Swans’ supporters<sup>16</sup>. Even today, Swans attract larger home crowds than other WAFL clubs and the compact nature of the ground makes a crowd of two to three thousand mostly Swans’ supporters still a fearsome proposition for opposition players and fans.

Although there was and is a members’ stand, the R.A. McDonald Stand, in the ground’s south-western corner, has always contained vocal and hard-core Swan Districts’ supporters of all ages. The stand still contains such dedicated supporters today, although nowadays there are empty seats during the main game. In the WAFL’s Golden Era (ending at the end of the 1986 season) patrons had to arrive long before the start of the main game to be assured a seat in the McDonald Stand (pronounced as if it had an extra “s” as in “McDonald’s Stand”). My late maternal grandfather HAA (1906-1999)<sup>17</sup> and his mate Ernie Henderson supported Swans and they always sat there, towards the top, in the seventies and into the first half of the eighties. I also sat with them there, on three or four occasions, although never when West Perth was the opponent.

On this most memorable day, most probably in 1985, the West Perth cheer squad headed out to Bassendean Oval, from Perth city-centre on the Midland train line. I cannot recall how many people met in the city-centre beforehand. There was probably a sub-group which got on at the city-centre and the long journey then magnified our good spirits, self-confidence, and camaraderie. West Perth had been performing well on the field in 1985 and a win would certainly not have been an unlikely outcome. The cheer squad was in celebration and party mood, travelling to a distant and remote ground at the far end of the metropolitan area. Many cheer squad members would not have gone to the ground before.

No part of Bassendean Oval is seemingly “reserved” for the away supporters (except perhaps the Bill Walker Stand which is located to the immediate right of the McDonald Stand when viewed from inside the playing arena). The McDonald Stand is only 20- or 30-metres from the southern-end goals. The northern-end goals are furthest from the train station so, logically, that was not the place for the away fans. The logic of the era was that visiting cheer squads (out of humility and respect) would stay nearest the entrance that was closest to the train station or major bus route so that meant, for example, the southern-end at Claremont Oval; the southern-end at Perth Oval; and the northern-end at East Fremantle Oval.

I can recall our West Perth group this day entering what were then the most popular gates of the oval, in the south-west corner closest to Success Hill train station, with our giant flags. In the environment of Bassendean Oval, these flags stood out like a sore thumb. Swans’ fans then had a dour and austere culture where you would not wear club colours. Anything slightly showy was frowned upon as not befitting this working-class district some distance away from the city-centre. Furthermore, Swans’ colours are black-and-white; the cheer squad’s red-and-blue replica playing jerseys and flags stood out like the first year of colour television. People probably thought that we were show-offs and smart-arses. We took the path of least resistance and set ourselves up behind the southern-end goals. The group’s flags and banners were right there in front of the line of sight of the McDonald Stand’s inhabitants some 25-metres away<sup>18</sup>. The heritage-protected ground is largely unchanged today.

The cheer squad was chanting its usual chants that day but with perhaps unusual venom. There had been animosity between West Perth supporters and Swan Districts’ manager John Todd since Todd left West Perth’s Brian Adamson out of a Western Australian combined state team in 1975 [24]. This animosity had then followed Todd across from East Fremantle to Swan Districts. Dawson writes as follows about the relationship between Swans and West Perth during the 1980s: “The feud was always publicly denied, but continued into the 1980s and all Swans-West Perth games were well-attended with many fiery incidents, off and on the field”. Swans’ record home ground attendance remains today the 22,350 people who watched Swans play West Perth on 10 May 1980 (Round 6) [25].

It may have been our “Ronnie Boucher walks on water / everybody knows that bullshit floats” chant that made the Swan Districts’ fans increasingly upset on this particular day in 1985. Swan Districts had no recognized or organized cheer squad then but generally cheer squads accept each other’s chants as just

<sup>16</sup> Remember that mandatory fan segregation has never existed in the WAFL.

<sup>17</sup> H.A.A. had three brothers. Out of the extended family only H.A.A.’s nephew Fred and I supported a team other than Swans with Fred also being a West Perth supporter.

<sup>18</sup> The view of the McDonald Stand from the southern-end goals and the opposite view can be viewed at the following link: <http://wafgoldenera.blogspot.co.uk/2017/02/opinion-presidents-response-to-todays.html> [accessed 14 September 2017].

part of the job description and not to be taken seriously. The McDonald Stand was an intimidating place in that era and our cheer squad was insulting Swans' favourite players and showing off its vibrant red-and-blue colours directly in front of their noses. The cheer squad also had its famous song, sung to the tune of the classic children's song "Old McDonald had a Farm": "Old McDonald had a stand / eyie eyie oh / and in that stand was full of pigs / eyie eyie oh". The distant origins of the real Mr. R.A. McDonald<sup>19</sup> meant that by 1985 our group clearly intended to insult a revered ancient folklore deity instead of an actual known person. The song was in effect an attack against local gods.

Around three-quarter time during the main game, we saw that a group of around eight to ten bare-chested Aboriginal youths, around the group members' ages or slightly older, had very quietly surrounded us and taken up strategic seating positions just outside the group on all three sides. This Aboriginal group began to make intimidating comments including that they would beat us up after the game. The Aboriginal group members wore no club colours but they were clearly Swans' supporters. They must have been offended by the West Perth flags and chanting. Our West Perth cheer squad watched the game much more diligently and stopped playing up to and taunting the inhabitants of the McDonald Stand. I could tell that our group members were apprehensive. Aboriginal gang culture and the culture of the suburbs around Bassendean Oval were not well known to any of the group. None of us had any reputation in the area that we could call on. It was the classic away fans scenario.

We all began to watch the game much more diligently and talk among ourselves; we adopted a much lower profile. People became grossly absorbed in the match, looked straight ahead, and quietly conversed in their twos and threes. This was partly a strategic act and partly a sub-conscious switch to the self-preservation mode. The chanting mostly stopped although I am sure that we still waved the flags after West Perth goals.

If we want some theorization of the West Perth cheer squad members' behavioural self-modifications after being threatened by the Aboriginal group of Swan Districts fans, we might cite Marsh [4] as follows:

"[w]e can instantly recognize dominant or submissive stances in other people and we frequently employ them ourselves ... Adopting a submissive posture is the clearest way in which ... a person ... can signal that he has had enough and thus avoid serious injury".

When the game ended, or possibly five or ten minutes prior to that, the West Perth cheer squad looked around and we saw that the Aboriginal group had disappeared. I do not think that

anyone even saw or heard them leave as they disappeared so quietly. Our West Perth group had passed some kind of test. Possibly the Swan Districts' group had decided that we were "good guys at heart" or possibly they had just lost interest in confrontation or had somewhere to go straight after the match. Swans' on-field victory that day might possibly have been seen by the Aboriginal group as having been vindication enough for them (as Mike B today claims (source: personal interview with the author, Kalgoorlie, 14 July 2011)).

Like the London Teddy Boys who menacingly surrounded Desmond Morris and his wife in a Camden Town cafe in 1957 but then paid the couple's bill and left with a friendly greeting (Morris [26] in the foreword to Marsh's *Aggro*), the Swan Districts group had reinforced territorial dominance by Swans' fans over all of Bassendean Oval, including the seats behind the southern-end goals, without resorting to actual violence. Marsh [4] explains further as follows: "When men enter into aggressive confrontations with each other, the object of the exercise is not killing but preservation of dominance relations, the defence of particular space or access to basic resources". Some might think that we outnumbered the Aboriginal group and we had the flags with long wooden stick handles which could have been used as weapons. Therefore, why were we so nervous? However, we must remember that firstly we had a number of 8-12-year-olds present among our number; and secondly that there was also the risk that nearby Swans' supporters would join in or the Aboriginal group would signal or summon their mates from other parts of the ground to assist them. We took a middle course in that we did not walk away but we did keep quiet and refrained from normal cheer squad behaviour other than waving the flags after goals which was our last symbolic act of resistance and solidarity.

This event at Bassendean Oval's southern-end goals was a near-miss for the West Perth cheer squad and our group members probably learned a lesson to be somewhat quieter, more respectful, and more circumspect in hostile away territory. It must be pointed out that the cheer squad members never viewed this encounter as any sort of "racial war" - our group was multicultural and we had a multicultural ethos. For example, DS from Tuart Hill was an ethnic Chinese and the brothers Tony and Mario were of Italian ethnicity. In fact West Perth supporters have long been referred to by the racist tag of "Garlic Munchers" (especially by East Perth fans). This tag emerged because of the large southern-European immigrant supporter base which was attracted to the club in the post-World War II period; and especially from the seventies onwards when the Italian-Australian ruck-rover Peter Menaglio was a star player in the senior team<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> The R.A. McDonald Stand was opened on 23 July 1938, four years after the club was admitted to the WAFL (East, 2009, pp. 21, 87). R.A. (Dick) McDonald was President in the early years of the Swans club and played an important role in the then second-division club gaining WAFL admission in 1934 when he was acting in his capacity as member of the Bassendean Road Board (ibid., pp. 12-6, 20, 191).

<sup>20</sup> Peter Ross Menaglio (DOB 4 September 1958) played 236 senior games for West Perth and kicked 185 goals between 1977 and 1989 (Atkinson, 2008, p. 367). He presently works as a *Real Estate Agent* for Edison Property Residential in North Perth. His office is only 2.4 kilometres away (via Bourke Street) from West Perth's original home ground Leederville Oval where Menaglio played many of his best games.

About the near-miss at Bassendean Oval, on reflection, I can say that our group had probably become a little over-confident and cheeky (or “cocky” in the Australian vernacular). Our cheer squad went to Bassendean Oval thinking that, because there was no organized Swan Districts’ cheer squad, we could pretty much express ourselves as we liked as far as flag-waving and noise-making were concerned. Being far from home created a carnival or a day-at-the-seaside atmosphere for our group members. The hostility between the two clubs was a factor in the background which was probably driving us on to chant a little louder. I probably did not “rate” the Aboriginal group when I first saw it as it was not a Melbourne-style cheer squad and its guys were shirtless and not wearing club colours. *Why was this day memorable aside from just the physical threat?* Perhaps because different concepts of fandom, match-day behaviours, and dress codes were operating and these concepts clashed. I respected and tried to keep cordial relationships with the Perth and Claremont cheer squads but I did not perceive any necessity to have a similar fraternal and respectful attitude with respect to any or all Swan Districts’ fans (even though my grandfather supported the club).

This Swan Districts versus West Perth match was probably either the 19.14(128) to 15.12(102) Swans’ victory on 8 April 1985 (attendance 10,500) or the 22.12(144) to 21.16(142) Swans’ victory on 20 July 1985 (attendance 9,462) (source: match scores are taken from Atkinson, 2008, pp. 334, 335 and attendances are from WAFL Online). It was probably the first of these as I do recall that interest had drained out of the match in the last 15 minutes as West Perth’s chances had dropped to zero by that point.

### Conclusion

In this article I have applied the anthropological approach to our 20 member West Perth cheer squad of 1984-86. I find that Armstrong’s anthropological approach is able to explain many aspects of our cheer squad’s culture and members’ behaviours including the quick disintegration of the cheer squad early in the 1986 season without anyone officially putting an end to it. However, our group members did not adjust their commitment downwards during the cheer squad’s years of action; most

members attended all home-and-away matches from May 1984 -March 1986.

Theoretically Marsh’s concept of “aggro” as “the illusion of violence” seems almost perfectly to describe and explain the tough posturing but generally peaceable behaviour of our West Perth cheer squad. It also well explains our group members’ partly sub-consciously adopted submissive attitude towards the Aboriginal Swan Districts’ fans at Bassendean Oval and their response to that submission (and their team’s convincing win) which was to quietly walk away, their job done. They had enforced the total authority of Swan Districts’ fans over every square-centimetre of Bassendean Oval without a punch being thrown in anger.

This research also shows the diffusion of Australian Rules football supporter culture from Melbourne to Adelaide and from these two cities to Perth, to a certain lesser extent, and the impact of TV news reports of British soccer hooliganism on our group’s style and macho posturing.

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### Dedication

This article is dedicated to my late maternal grandfather Herbert Arthur Acott (1906-99).

### Disclaimer

The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily the same as those of Brian Atkinson; Australian Football League (AFL); Swan Districts Football Club (SDFC); West Perth Football Club (WPFC); West Perth Football Club cheer squad 1984-86 or any of its members; Western Australian Football Commission (WAFC); Western Australian Football League (WAFL); and / or any of the study’s interviewees. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers should be aware that this article includes the names of persons who are deceased.

## Appendix A

### Sub-gangs, West Perth Cheer Squad, 1984-86 (ages as at 1984)

#### The Booragoon sub-gang

1 \*The author, 15 years, Applecross Senior High School student (1984-85) then university student (1986)

2 \*Mike B., 16 years, Applecross Senior High School (1984-85) then occupation unknown (1986), school friend of the author

#### The Carine sub-gang

3 Courtney, 14 years, high-school student, junior football friend of Thommo

4 Rohan H., 14 years, high-school student, school friend of Courtney

### Floaters / non-aligned

5 \*Mark T. aka "Thommo", 14 years, high-school student (1984-85), plasterer (1986); junior football friend of Courtney

6 \*Robbie, 14 years, joined cheer squad 1985, lived in Balga, took buses home with Balga sub-gang, knew Thommo before joining cheer squad, also in Balga sub-gang

### The Balga sub-gang

7 \*"P.A.", 18 years, lived in Balga, employment situation unknown

8 \*Dave S. (name changed), 16 years, lived in nearby Tuart Hill but took buses to games with P.A. and Robbie, school / employment situation unknown

### The C. brothers sub-gang

9 \*Mike C., 16 years, in and out of reform homes

10 \*Robert C., 15 years, only went to games occasionally, had criminal record

11 \*Pete C., 14 years, in and out of reform homes

12 \*Female niece or cousin of the C. brothers, 4 years, attended 50% of games

### The Perth Modern SHS sub-gang

13 Ben McAuliffe, 13-14 years, John XIII college student

14 Rob, 13-14 years, Perth Modern SHS student, friend of Ben and Tony

15 Tony, 12-13 years, Perth Modern SHS student, school friend of Rob

16 Mario, 8-9 years, younger brother of Tony (also in younger members sub-gang)

### The younger members sub-gang

17 Michael aka "Half", 8 years, parents were financial members of West Perth, no relationship to other cheer squad members, lived in Bayswater or Maylands

18 \*"Thommo Junior", 8 years, younger brother of Thommo

\*denotes took public transport to and from games.

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