

The Early Days of the Albury Football Club

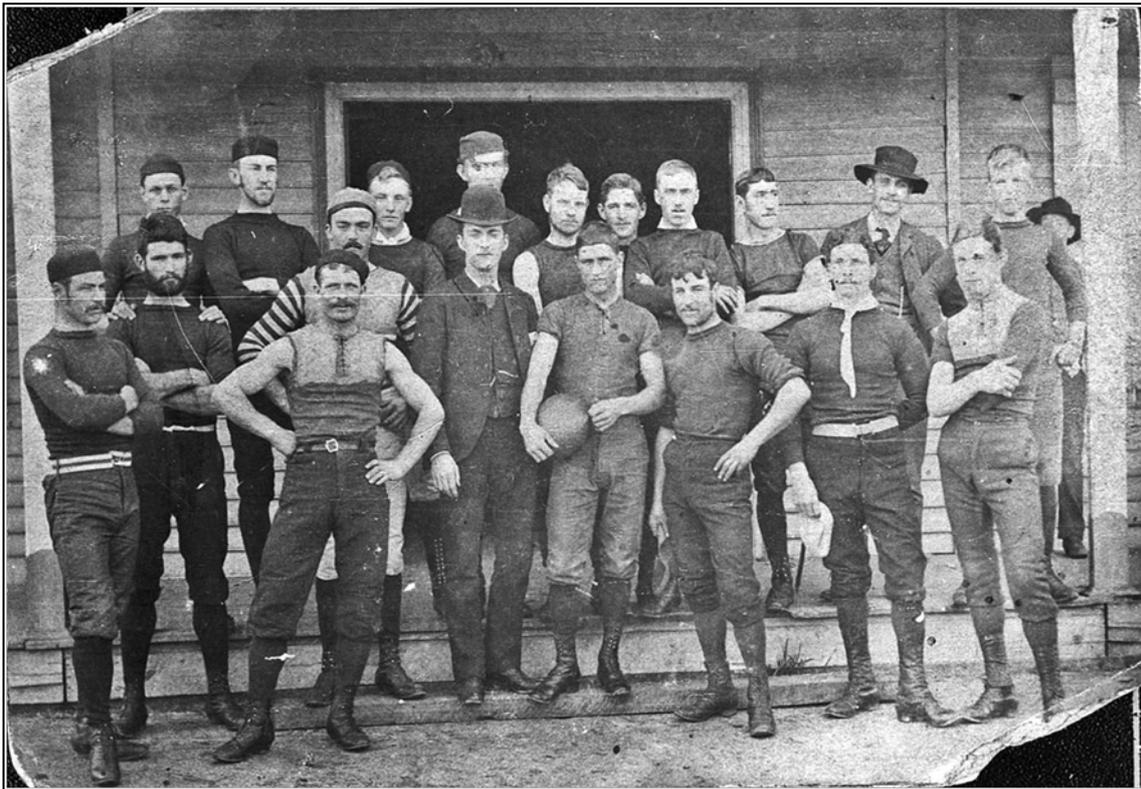
Greg Ryan

The *Border Post* of June 7, 1876 reported a meeting at Day's Commercial Building, Dean street - it was resolved "That a football club be established to be designated the Albury Football Club ... the committee agree to adopt the Victorian rules of football."

Newspaper reports imply that matches were arranged in a fairly random fashion. In the early days, matches were played with a round ball or a rugby ball. The erratic bouncing Sherrin became the official VFL ball in 1897.

Local matches were played on the Albury Cricket Ground, later renamed the Albury Sportsground. The area was marked as a rectangular field with no behind posts. Behinds were introduced in the early 1880s, scored if the ball passed the goal line, but not between the only two posts. In 1887 the distance of the behind posts from the goal posts was decreased from 18.2m to 9.1m.

This helps explain some results: in 1881 Wagga 4 goals 16 behinds defeated Albury 1 goal 11 behinds. Albury turned the tables in 1883 defeating Wagga 3 goals 22 behinds to 1 goal 1 behind.



Albury Football Team in 1884 in front of the pavilion at the northern end of Albury Sportsground (then known as Albury Cricket Ground)

Albury's team list in the *Wagga Advertiser* for the 1881 clash: "Centre players, Jackson (captain), Battye, Lamarchand; forwards, Bamber, Steele, Warden; backs, Watson, Day, Dawson; followers, Holden, Hodgson, Chauncey, Futter; goal-sneak, Buckley; goal-keeper, Moore."

Keeping football teams fully manned was a challenge. In July 1882, Albury FC and Mechanics FC amalgamated to form Albury United FC. By the mid 1880s 'United' was dropped and the club again referred to as Albury FC.

Supporters liked to 'let their hair down' - after an Albury Federals v Chiltern match, the *Corowa Free Press* of July 23 1886 told its readers: "Two or three buggy loads of revellers, returning from the Albury football match, pulled up at the Bogusmungi Hotel about 1 o'clock on Sunday morn, and were very successful in making the night hideous with their discordant shouts and yells, endeavouring to obtain admittance to wet their thirsty whistles."

The players also took things seriously - in the same newspaper: "The Albury and Chiltern football match was something horrific in its most literal sense ... the New South Welshmen, succeeded admirably in dislocating an ankle of one of the visitors, at the cost of breaking an arm in the achievement ... mobbing the umpire, and threatening summary vengeance on his devoted head because he refused to allow them a disputed goal." The final score was Albury 2 goals 13 behinds, Chiltern 1 goal 1 behind.