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AFL GRAND FINAL

I was born in July 1967 at the Epworth Richmond Hospital. Despite the fact we lived in Geelong, Mum's first baby, my sister Vic, was born in Melbourne and so that dictated the delivery for the rest of us. Three days later I was in the backseat headed down the freeway to Geelong.

That connection between Richmond and Geelong was cemented ten weeks later when both teams played in the Grand Final.

It was a game for the ages. Sam Newman, my boyhood hero famously had to sit the game out after a bruising clash in the first Semi-Final against Collingwood which saw him undergo partial removal of a kidney. Geelong was leading at the 18-minute mark of the final quarter before two late goals to Richmond saw them sneak home by 9 points.

On 11 May 1974, I went to my first game. It was a profound experience that I still treasure. Geelong was taking on the reigning premiers Richmond at the MCG. Sam Newman played and picked up 14 possessions as the Cats fought their way to a ten-point victory. Yet it turned out to be a mere hiccup for the Tigers as they went back-to-back.

Those who played in that 1974 game were the giants of my childhood.

Along with Sam, there was David Clarke whose silky skills carried with them the feeling that he had been gifted divine power. The Nankervis brothers were the backbone of the team who, together, brought to bear a busy and reliable sense of industry. Jumping Jack Hawkins – the father of Tom – had us sitting on the edge of our seats feeling that a supernatural leap to the heavens was imminent. And a 19-year-old Michael Turner showed a turn of pace that would excite fans for years to come.

But while this line-up allowed us to hope, we were still investing our emotions in David as we took on Goliath. Richmond of 1974 was big, bad and scary. Mal Brown was an apex predator who crunched bones with the indifference of a feeding shark. Francis Bourke was a warrior who seemed capable of playing even if all his bones were crunched. Rex Hunt had the presence of two men. Royce Hart had the class of a prince. Kevin Sheedy was a working-class scrapper. And Kevin Bartlett, hair already thinning, could turn on a dime and weave magic with the ball.

Tribe defined my love for Geelong. But both teams gave me a love of footy.

There were other great matches to come, like in July of 1980 which saw a Geelong triumph only

to watch Richmond once again take out the flag. Yet witnessing a 1967 Grand Final replay has eluded us until now. Saturday and cheering on my contemporary Cats will be that 6-year-old boy who was first mesmerized by both teams on that day back in 1974.

Go Cats.

Richard Marles is deputy federal opposition leader, Member for Corio and a mad Cat

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