

1890's – An Eventful First Decade

Mitcham's first decade endured a merry-go-round of events. Hit by depression, an inter-club merger, the club reformed as the Mitcham Football Club, went into a temporary recess and re-emerged as the 1902 'Champions of the District' ... effectively the Premiers.

Melbourne Town:

Melbourne in the 1880's was booming, powered by an economic boom in real estate prices, land speculation and the last remnants of the gold rush wealth, generated within the Colony of Victoria. The Colony's prosperity saw many magnificent historical structures, still seen around Melbourne today, the Exhibition Buildings and Princess Bridge being but two. Both of these were completed in 1888, the same year MFC was established.



However, after only 6 years into the MFC's football existence, life dramatically changed in the early / mid 1890's as the depression hit hard, world markets collapsed. This plunged colonial, rural-living into survival mode. General life was very unsettling and footy took a backward step ... to ensure food was on the table, and a roof was overhead for the Mitcham families. Players were certainly not paid to play football, so any football injuries would very likely prevent them earning a living. Most work was manual and the risk was simply too great.

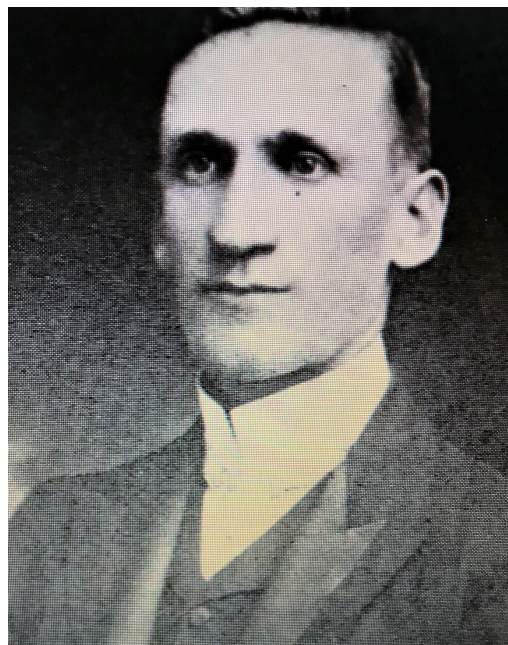
The Merger:

In 1893, three local football clubs decided they had to merge to survive, with the secondary reason being to form a strong football team to represent the District. The **Surrey Hills, Mitcham** and **Box Hill** Football Clubs each convened separate Special AGMs, with all three clubs deciding to amalgamate and pool their resources and players. The new football club was called the **Nunawading Football Club**, representing the Shire of Nunawading. Home games were played at the Surrey Hills ground, at Surrey Park. The new club jumpers tried to please all, with a combination of long black, red and white stripes on a blue jumper and a red cap. Caps were viewed as part of the uniform.

The club played in the Metropolitan Junior Football Association, a fore runner to the Victorian Amateur Football Association. Under the Presidency of Dr. Percy Liddle and George Humberstone as Secretary, the new club stated: 'It would field a first class team to represent the District, making the crack teams sit up before the season's end'. Mitcham players were prominent, and provided the Captain and Vice-Captain in Arthur Edgoose and Harold Pratt respectfully. Harold was the father of the great Bob Pratt the South Melbourne player, who kicked 150 goals in 1934 and became an AFL Hall of Fame – Legend. Mitcham player Jack Geddes in 1892 was Carlton Football Club's leading goal kicker, and in 1894 he returned to join his Mitcham mates now playing for the Nunawading Football Club.



Jack Geddes, Carlton leading goalkicker in 1892, joined Nunawading (from Hawthorn) in June 1894.



Dr. Percy Liddle. President of the Nunawading FC

Marriage - Short Lived:

Whilst the new club performed creditably, the new 'marriage' did not feel right and was short on loyalty and a sense of home. The impact of some players being 'no-shows' on game day certainly did not help the cause of this fledgling Club. After only three years, 1893 - 1895, Mitcham was the first club keen to dissolve its inter-club merger. Box Hill then did the same, whilst Surrey Hills continued to play as Nunawading Football Club for another season.

1896 - Back Home:

Mitcham promptly held two public meetings in March 1896 at the Reserve Hotel. With much local spirit the Mitcham Football Club was reformed and importantly regained its Mitcham identity. And the club was happy to be playing back on its own Mitcham Village Square on the corner of Whitehorse and Mitcham roads.

1896: Mitcham was back in town, but played in a poorly run five-club football competition comprising: Mitcham, Box Hill, Burwood, Clendon and Nunawading.

1897: Football continued as did a number of teams, within the Eastern Suburban 4th Rate Football Association. Teams were: Mitcham, Blackburn, Doncaster Rovers, Burwood, Richmond Hill, Templestowe, Hawthorn Rovers.

1898: Temporary Recess:

Mitcham, along with other nearby football clubs, faced the imminent demise of an unorganized football competition and went into temporary recess from 1898 - 1901. As did Canterbury, Hawthorn, Surrey Hills and Burwood who also failed to field teams over this time.

The Eastern Suburban Football Association continued to have substantial problems. Clubs were also fed-up playing far-away games, against unknown players, plus unsavory supporters often took advantage of their home-base to direct abuse and violence at the visiting team. Whilst also at the time, the Boer War in South Africa, had a marginal effect on player numbers. Overall, there must have been a degree of unsettlement among some of Mitcham's leading players.

In 1900 and 1901:

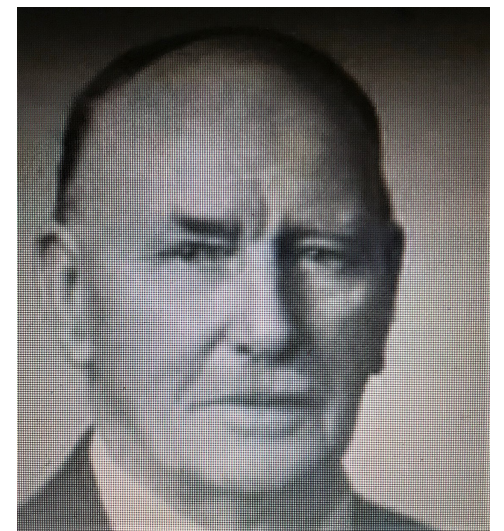
Numerous key Mitcham players left to play for the opposition team, Ringwood Imperials. Interestingly, Ringwood Imperials played their home games on Mitcham's ground at Walker Park. Many 'journeymen players' existed in this era, and changing teams was not uncommon. Not surprisingly during these years, a composite football team remained in Mitcham, known as the Mitcham Tile Works Club. The players were employees from the dominate local employer: Australian Tessellated Tile Company, owned by Edgar Edwards Walker. Walker was keen to ensure that football remained in Mitcham. This fired-up his desire to get further involved. As Mitcham's leading citizen, and local Councilor, Walker took control when he became Mitcham Football Club President in 1903. Thereafter Walker drove the club into a very successful era, scattered with many achievements and Premierships.

1902 - Champions of the District:

Mitcham Football Club and other clubs, reformed in 1902, and realized the Eastern Suburban Football Association was far more organized, especially with a greater focus on a more local team competition. Importantly footy was back in earnest in the east.

Mitcham and Canterbury were clearly the dominate teams against: Camberwell, Doncaster, Bayswater and Ringwood Imperials. The 'Minor Premiers' is the team that finishes on top of the ladder at season's-end. There was no football final series organized by the ESF Association in 1902. Mitcham comfortably accounted for Canterbury in the season's home stretch and finished clear on top of the ladder. Hence, Mitcham was officially declared the 'Champions of the District' ... effectively the 1902 Premiership Team. The District encompassed a large area of the rural outer East of Melbourne, from Hawthorn to Lilydale and from Templestowe to Mulgrave. Much the same area, as the Eastern Football League of today.

Mitcham's 'Golden Era' had commenced.



Arthur Edgoose: former Mitcham player.
Captain of Nunawading in the merger.
Returned to Mitcham in 1896 when club reformed.