

ROBERT ALLEN



Cazaly

THE
LEGEND



1938

Roy Cazaly portrait
(CAZALY FAMILY)

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‘UP THERE CAZALY!’

SOUTH MELBOURNE AND VICTORIA, 1921

Cazaly had the right combination of skills to be a great follower, but he also knew from his years at St Kilda that an effective ruck depended on three players able to work closely together. Richmond premiership captain, coach and follower Percy Bentley understood that successful ruck play required a combination of skill, strategy and good communication. He later explained that:

The ruck is the driving force of the football team. Perfect understanding must be developed between the two followers. Remember the cardinal rule for the ruckman is to make the place men, and the smaller men of the side, play around him. In this he is both a battleship and a supply ship. Know where the rover is and try to give him the ball ahead of him so that he can break away towards the goal. That type of understanding brings fast, odd man exchanges that are the soul of good teamwork.³⁹⁸

All of the individual and team skills that Bentley advocated came together in South Melbourne’s ruck trio of Cazaly, Manfred ‘Fred’ Fleiter and Mark Tandy. Fleiter was born in Carlton in 1897, the son of a German-born father and a Tasmanian mother, and grew up in Albert Park. His older brother Emil had played football with Cazaly at school. Fred gained the nickname ‘Skeeter’ as a junior footballer because he had thin legs like a mosquito, and it stuck with him throughout his career. As a youth, he was also a talented

cricketer and a champion swimmer with the South Melbourne Open Sea Bathing Club. Cazaly was also a member, and the pair had performed as 'grotesque lifesavers' in a comedy routine during the official opening of the bathing season in December 1917.³⁹⁹

Fleiter's solid football form with South Melbourne Districts soon brought him to the attention of South Melbourne, but his senior debut was delayed when he fractured an arm during a pre-season practice match in 1919. He recovered in time to play three games that year and every match of the following two. A newspaper profile described him as a "tall, hefty shepherd" who stood six feet tall in his socks and weighed 12 stone 10 lbs.

Occasionally he plays at half-back, but he follows for the greater part of the game and likes it better than watching from a place. He is fast for his size, and his bodily strength is backed by a ready intelligence and a clear perception of where his duty lies to his team when the game is on. Fleiter, like the "shepherds" of other teams, knows his work and is quite unconcerned about what people outside the fence think. 'My idea of football is that a man must do his best for his side no matter where he is placed. I am in the team to play my hardest, and I am prepared to do it.'⁴⁰⁰

"Fleiter was a great fellow to work with," Cazaly later recalled.

He made every sacrifice for me. He took hard knocks [and] he fought his way through formidable packs so that I could get a clear run at the ball. 'Skeet' was a great footballer. Something more than the shepherd in the accepted sense of the term. Skeet had football brains.⁴⁰¹

Mark 'Napper' Tandy had played on the wing when he first joined South Melbourne from Yarraville in 1911, and played a key role in their narrow premiership win over Collingwood in 1918. He was quick, cunning and easily spotted on the field due to his mop of sandy hair. Tandy worked at the Metropolitan Gas Works in West Melbourne. He kept fit and trained hard, although one contemporary profile euphemistically noted "he is no faddist, and enjoys the average luxuries an Australian man indulges in." A renowned joker both on and off the field, he was famous for performing his "sword dance" at club social outings.⁴⁰²



Cigarette swap cards of Roy Cazaly, Mark Tandy and Fred Fleiter issued in 1921

Cazaly later said that ‘Napper’ Tandy was the best rover he ever saw. He gave him his nickname because of his tendency to “go to sleep” on the field:

He was the most complacent rover I ever rucked to. I would stir the soul out of him if we were being beaten ... He would just shake his head, smile, and say, ‘Well, you’re boss,’ or ‘Have it your own way.’⁴⁰³

Cazaly and Fleiter first played in the ruck together against Melbourne in round 4 of the 1921 season, and Tandy joined them as rover the next week. Over time, the trio developed a close understanding of their roles and a sixth sense of one another’s whereabouts on the field. “We practised night after night,” Cazaly later recalled.

We had to work for it. Finally we were so accustomed to each other that it was like mind-reading. We were a true ruck team in every sense.⁴⁰⁴

Football writers began to write in glowing terms about South’s dominant ruck combination, even in games where the rest of the team were well beaten. After a loss against Collingwood, the *Record* noted that:

Cazaly, Fleiter and Tandy, South’s first ruckmen, were a fine trio. Cazaly all day was a prominent man. His marking was brilliant. He met the ball one-handed on occasions, and gathered it in for the mark with great skill. Tandy was one of the best on the ground.⁴⁰⁵

Similarly, *The Australasian's* John Worrall remarked after a loss to Essendon that “although South Melbourne were woefully handicapped in the ineffectiveness of their battery, their play in the outer field, and in the ruck, where Cazaly, Fleiter and Tandy were acting in concert, was of such a character that the match was a fine one to witness.”⁴⁰⁶

The trio achieved a further measure of fame during 1921 when they were included in a series of cigarette swap cards issued by the Schuh Tobacco Company.⁴⁰⁷ They would continue as South's first ruck combination until a knee injury to Fleiter part way through the 1922 season forced a change to the team's line-up. While they would occasionally reunite later on they were at their most potent during this relatively brief period between early 1921 and mid-1922.

It was during the 1921 season that the 'Up there Cazaly' call was coined. The use of 'Up there' in football parlance was not new. It had been used in reference to other players before and—on at least one occasion—to an entire team.⁴⁰⁸ Now, however, the expression became synonymous with just one player: Cazaly. Fred Fleiter was the author of the phrase and in subsequent years Cazaly never tired of explaining how it originated:

We used to nominate who was going for the ball. With a kick coming from either end, Tandy would take the short ones, Fleiter the middle length ones, and I the long ones. When I was to go, Fleiter would yell, 'Up there Cazaly' and up I'd go. Then the crowd began to catch on to the system and they'd yell the same thing.⁴⁰⁹

Exactly when crowds began to “catch on” and use the phrase is unknown. In all likelihood it was a South Melbourne supporter near the boundary line who heard Fleiter's cry, repeated it, and was soon joined by others whenever the ball was in the air and heading towards Cazaly.⁴¹⁰

Cazaly's and Tandy's consistent form saw them both selected in the Victorian team for the fourth Australian National Football Carnival in Perth in August 1921.⁴¹¹ The triennial carnivals were designed to include teams

from each state but high transport costs meant only Western Australia, Victoria and South Australia competed at the first post-war carnival. It was Cazaly's first representative appearance for his state and Tandy's fourth.

Victoria's first match was against South Australia at Fremantle Oval, and resulted in an easy 35-point win by the Victorians. Cazaly, who kicked a goal and was among Victoria's best, started at half-forward before moving to the ruck while Tandy played on a wing. The Victorians' second game, against Western Australia at Subiaco four days later, was much more evenly matched and ended in a narrow loss to the home team by five points. The West Australians then defeated South Australia to win the round robin series.

South Melbourne's committee must have asked Cazaly to scout for possible recruits during the carnival because their minutes record he'd "watched the play of Iron [sic] very closely and in his opinion the player named was too slow and would not be suitable for our team."⁴¹² Cazaly was referring to Fred 'Fat' Ion, Western Australia's bullocking ruckman. Ion was also known as the 'Glaxo Baby', after the well-nourished mascot of the Glaxo baby food company. He was six feet tall and weighed more than 16 stone but Cazaly's assessment may have been harsh because a contemporary account described Ion as a "solidly built but nimble and very fast shepherding ruckman."⁴¹³ South had probably asked Cazaly to look for a follower to recruit. If so, Cazaly might have shrewdly downplayed Ion's abilities, knowing a more effusive appraisal could jeopardise his mate Fred Fleiter's future in the side.⁴¹⁴

South Melbourne finished the season in seventh position, with five wins, one draw and 10 losses. Cazaly had played every game and was the team's leading goalscorer, with 19. Among the club prizes he was named 'Best all round' player, with Fleiter 'Most improved' and Tandy 'Most consistent'.⁴¹⁵ One South Melbourne official who had known Cazaly when he was with St Kilda later marvelled at his transformation "from novice to weight-for-age company" at his new club.⁴¹⁶

Cazaly coached South Warrnambool again during the 1921 finals and the team defeated Koroit for the district premiership. One of their stars was vice-captain Colin Watson, who had returned to his home town the previous year after the internal ructions at St Kilda. There is less ambiguity

about Cazaly's role this season than in 1919: a photo of the premiership side includes him standing in the middle of the back row.⁴¹⁷

At the end of the VFL season, *The Herald* newspaper held a readers' poll to determine the competition's best positional players. More than 14,000 people voted and when the entries were tallied Cazaly was declared the League's best follower.⁴¹⁸ His turnaround in fortunes from just a year earlier at St Kilda was complete.

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Roy Cazaly's extraordinary story is one of the great tales of Australian Football.

Born in the depths of a depression, he overcame humble beginnings and personal setbacks to become one of our most celebrated footballers. His sublime skills and thrilling aerial feats made him a legend in his lifetime, with his name carried into the modern era via Mike Brady's hymn to football—'Up There Cazaly'. In 1996 he became one of 12 inaugural Legends of the Australian Football Hall Of Fame. A relentless self-improver, Cazaly shaped the game's development, applied his own theories on fitness, training and teamwork, and coached teams to premiership success. Away from the field, he enriched the lives of many more as a physiotherapist, horse trainer, philosopher and family man. Robert Allen's meticulous research, gathered over 10 years, reveals in great detail the story of the man behind the catchcry.



“Little did I know when I wrote Up there Cazaly back in 1979 that I had chosen as a subject a man who was revered as a sportsman of many facets including fairness, a fair go and healthy living. He was ahead of his time.”

MIKE BRADY



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