



Mike Sheahan  
***Open Mike: Conversations from the Ground-Breaking Fox Footy Program***  
Slattery Media Group, Richmond (Victoria), 2013.  
ISBN: 9780987420541

Last year was a significant year for AFL football broadcasting. There was a billion dollar five-year television rights deal, the football diehards' gospel channel *Fox Footy* reappeared on our screens and we saw ruthless tit-for-tat talent poaching between football broadcasting stations.

Yet behind the glitzy deals and headlines, a stalwart of football journalism, Mike Sheahan, decided to hang up his pen and pull back from full-time duties at the *Herald Sun*.

Mike's book *Open Mike* is a transcript of his own one-on-one, Andrew Denton-like interview show on *Fox Footy*. In what was his most publicly praised work in 2012 while in semi-retirement and certainly his least controversial (Mike's Top 50 anyone?), Sheahan interviews past and present players and coaches and even the great Tony Charlton.

After seeing *Open Mike* on TV and in print, the interviews can be enjoyed on both platforms. In the book, neat career summaries are provided before each interview. Sheahan's strengths as an interviewer, like his short and direct questioning, are very evident in his book.

Occasionally we are hit with some eye-opening reading such as Robert Wall's admission that he deserved to get the sack from Carlton and emotion-stirring moments like Dermot Brereton's personal struggle with two family members committing suicide.

While a number of interviews don't necessarily reveal anything new, startling or shocking, Brereton's interview was particularly illuminating. 'The Kid' or 'Judge Dermie' can sometimes be portrayed as just the big-headed blonde media personality, but Dermie's interview showed a complex, reflective and candid side to him that the general public are not exposed to.

Mostly, this book is an opportunity for footy lovers to reminisce over their champions and villains and, in a few cases, understand them from beyond the boundary.

**Michael Collins.**

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Graeme Patterson  
***The Man in White: Country Connections: 80 years of umpiring with the VFL Umpires' Association.***  
Australian Football League Umpires' Association, Carlton (Victoria), 2012.

In 2009 the Australian Football League Umpires' Association celebrated its century with the substantial publication of *The Man in White*, its official history of 100 years of umpiring with the VFL and the AFL.

This new book is a companion to the official history with a focus on umpiring in the country regions of Victoria, southern New South Wales, eastern South Australia and parts of Tasmania. The VFL Umpires' Association was created in 1909 and from that time provided umpires to country competitions.

This publication is a true labour of love with many former umpires providing anecdotes and nostalgic recollections. Author Graeme Patterson has utilised the fine research of a steering committee, volunteers and the accounts of those umpires involved.

A large proportion of the 265 leagues listed in the appendix no longer exist. Some competitions had umpires provided for home and away games, finals and grand finals, while others could not rely on such full servicing.

The logistics of getting umpires to games was complicated. They could arrive by train, bus, aeroplane or taxi. Groups of umpires would leave early on Saturday morning to travel to the games and return late at night, the next day, or even Monday. The stories stress the rigour of getting to venues and the time involved, but most of all the close-knit camaraderie of the umpiring fraternity and the enjoyment gained from the experience.

Readers discover VFLUA members sang *The Man in White* with the lines: 'Send a cheer over here, when the men in white appear.' The umpires regularly trained at different city venues during the week.

The book includes umpire awards, detailed biographies and an extensive list of VFLUA country field umpires from 1909 to 1991, which includes many who went on to senior level. This work is so thorough that it provides interesting snippets on individual umpires including those who were talented in other sporting fields and those who were related.

This history of the Victorian Football Umpires' Association includes fond memories of umpiring in the country and the involvement of the people of the bush, including minders, officials, players and members of the football public. The book contains interesting and appropriate illustrations with one catch-phrase ringing throughout the book: 'The men in white are always right.'

**David Allen and Eric Panther**

