

# Remembering football's first 'Lions'

ASHLEY BROWNE

**T**he AFL goalposts will come down at Etihad Stadium temporarily on Saturday night as the British and Irish Lions come to Melbourne to take on the Wallabies.

The Lions come together as a team only once every four years and visit Australia only once every 12 years. For rugby fans, this is a big deal.

The Lions first visited Australia in 1888, a tour that has been painstakingly revisited by writer Sean Fagan in a new book, *The First Lions of Rugby*.

What is most remarkable, and totally forgotten until now, is that the Lions did not just restrict themselves to rugby through the five-month tour that included games in Australia and New Zealand. There was also a heavy Australian Football component.

After two weeks of preparation in between rugby games, the Lions arrived in Melbourne to a rapturous reception and, on June 16, played Carlton at the MCG in front of a packed house of 26,000.

This was not a hybrid game of any description. The Blues and the Lions played the game under the VFA rules of the time. The only concession was that Essendon's Jack Lawlor and Geelong's Fred McShane, enlisted by the tourists to teach them the intricacies of the Australian game, were permitted to play.

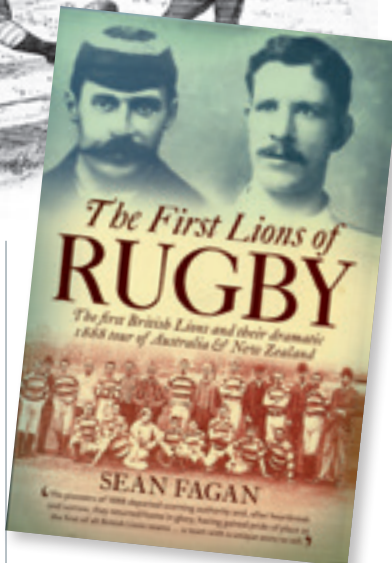
Carlton won 14.17 to 3.8. But the game was universally hailed as a success and Fagan writes that the post-match reviews all suggested the Lions fared better than expected.

From there, the Lions crisscrossed their way through Victoria and South Australia. They played several clubs from the still-burgeoning Victorian goldfields as well as leading metropolitan teams such as South Melbourne, Fitzroy, Port Melbourne, Port Adelaide, South Adelaide, Norwood, Essendon and Melbourne.

All up, the Lions won seven of their 18 Australian Football matches, with another finishing as a draw. Over the journey, they began to grasp the nuances of the game, set themselves




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**ARTIST'S IMPRESSIONS:** As well as rugby, the British Lions played 18 Australian Football matches on their 1888 tour of Australia.

up better from a tactical point of view and came to understand the burly, bullocking types who excel at rugby were not best suited to the Australian game, which even in 1888, suited players of any shape or size.

But the tourists left their mark on the game. Fagan notes that, based on feedback from the Lions, rules were changed later that year so that a kick for goal could take place after the bell had sounded for the end of a quarter, the minimum distance for a mark was extended to 10 yards and players could kick in any direction after a mark or a free kick. 

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THE FIRST LIONS OF RUGBY, BY SEAN FAGAN. PUBLISHED BY THE SLATTERY MEDIA GROUP. RRP \$34.95

PERSONAL BEST

## 'DOORMAT' CUTS IT

» The AFL has long been an incubator for the best, the worst and the most bizarre hairstyles.

Nic Naitanui's 'palm tree' has always attracted attention, although in the case of the West Coast superstar, his football does most of the talking.

Still, he jumped at the opportunity to talk about weird and wonderful AFL hairstyles in this week's edition of *Personal Best* on [AFL.com.au](http://AFL.com.au).

Mullets – both full and bareheaded – get a run, as do dreadlocks, bleached blonds, big shags, rat's tails, Mohawks and monk cuts.

Among those to feature are Karl Langdon, Dermott Brereton, Ivan Maric, Taylor Walker and Danny Southern. But the No. 1 went to former Carlton champion Bruce Doull, who Naitanui called an "innovator" with his headband.

"He had the balding long hair as well and he deserved the name of the 'Flying Doormat'," he said. "Not many guys get the opportunity to have something named after them. I've been called the 'Palm Tree', but I'm just following in the footsteps of a Carlton legend."

*Personal Best* appears every Wednesday on [AFL.com.au](http://AFL.com.au).



## NEXT WEEK

Collingwood's Dayne Beams rates the 10 best Queenslanders to have played in the AFL.

