

Sport's become a whole new game

Dennis Cometti remembers the glory days of WA footy, and how the right people helped the channel bind itself to a sporting community.



Harry Kelly

At the risk of shaking your confidence, this is not intended to be an historical document: it's really just the recollections of one man. I guess the concern is, the memory of the man in question seems to be getting hazier by the week. Best I write this quickly.

I was around when Channel 7 started in Perth. Back then I was a small big sports fan.

And Sport at Seven, with host Syd Donovan and racing's Doug Gilmore every Saturday night, was my idea of heaven. During the winter each show contained slow-motion film clips of every WANFL game played that afternoon. Wow!

The first grand final to be captured on videotape was the Claremont-East Fremantle game in 1964. The Tigers won by four points despite my footy hero, Bob Johnson, kicking eight goals.

To this day I often replay this game, not only because it was a beauty but also because my father and I are easily found sitting in the front row. Unfortunately, the commentators of the day, Brien Thirley and Bob Miller, ignored both of us. Not so much as a mention. Bloody commentators!

As television grew, it took football in particular along for the ride. The early 60s gave rise to one of Western Australia's favourite Sunday institutions, World of Football.

The format implemented by producer Harry Kelly, his right-hand man, Barry Daniels, and director Gerry Swift was perfect for its time. In fact, when you look at the panel shows of today, little has changed.

In those days, shows like World of Football took little time to dominate their market. There was no interstate, let alone overseas, sport to fragment the audience. Satellites were still in the future.

But while expectations were low, excitement was high. Names like Frank Sparrow, Ross Elliott, Steve Marsh, Marty McDonnell and Mick Cronin were suddenly media stars. These were times like no other.

In the early days of World of Football the VFL barely cracked a mention. Just the scores and very little else. It's



fair to say that because television was so fundamentally local and so technically unsophisticated, the 60s saw WA football reach the high point of its history.

But change was on the horizon. With the advent of videotape, VFL replays started to find their way to Perth. Channel 7 used to screen them late on a Monday night. The catch was, the tape had to be physically delivered to the studios in Tuart Hill. I had a Monday night ritual, to try to stay awake for the replay but as often as not, either the plane or I didn't make it.

By the 70s, technology had become the mantra of television, and, by extension, footy. Satellites started delivering sport like never before. The momentum was breathtaking.

You don't need me to tell you any more really. Just turn on your television and then measure your own expectations of sports coverage. From those spectacular underwater