

MERGER

THE FITZROY LIONS AND THE TRAGEDY OF 1996

WILLIAM WESTERMAN

*'The demise of Fitzroy is a deep wound rather than a scar.
A tear in the fabric of the game that will never truly repair.'*

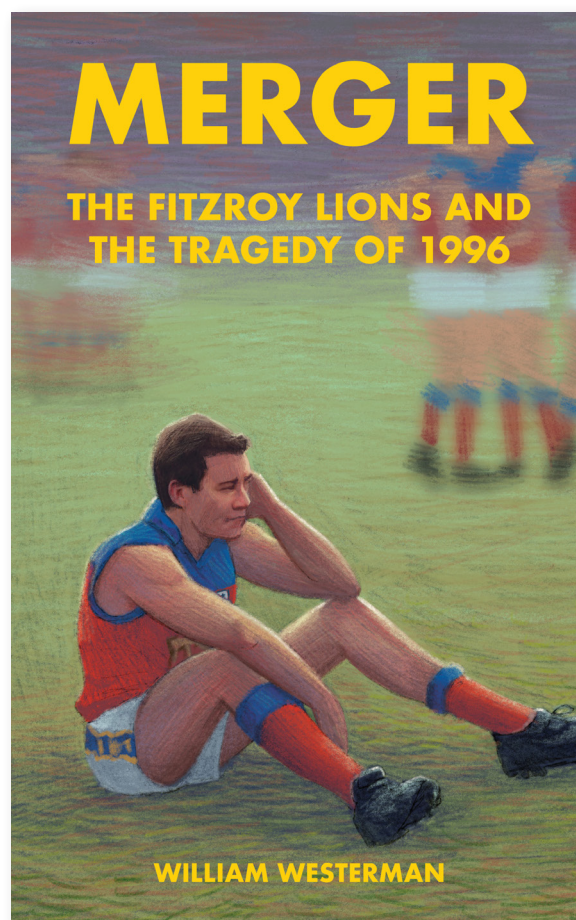
From the Foreword by Gerard Whateley

For the first time, this book reveals in full intriguing detail the causes and the effect of the Fitzroy Football Club's demise from the AFL.

It was nothing short of the worst year ever experienced by a VFL/AFL club. After years of doubt and anxiety over the club's financial situation, where season after season, speculation and rumour was rife that the club would either fold or be forced to merge, club officials, players and supporters were finally faced with a no-win scenario - in 1996 the Fitzroy Lions ran out of money and they ran out of time. To save some remnant of the club, AFL administrators enabled the club to merge with the Brisbane Bears, creating the league's first, and thus far only merger.

Merger tells the story of this historic and tragic season in an unprecedented degree of depth, scope and clarity to ensure that Fitzroy's final, doomed season is both fully understood and not forgotten. It captures the story from above and below: from the Lions' beleaguered president and the hard-nosed AFL administrators he fought, to the players caught in the middle of these fateful events and the volunteers and supporters, those who were the heart and soul of Fitzroy, who were left shattered and disillusioned by the loss of their club.

In exploring the 1996 merger, the book asks pertinent questions about the current AFL and its relationship with supporters, with commercial interests and with its own heritage. This makes *Merger* more than a mere work of history, but a timely entry into an important conversation about the future of Australian rules football at the highest level.



- This is the definitive account of the merger between Fitzroy and Brisbane.
- The book is set to be launched to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the signing of the merger agreement.
- It is a product of years of intense research, with the author interviewing dozens of participants and gaining rare access to official AFL documents.
- The author brings scholarly rigour and analytical insight to a book aimed at the general reader, treating the subject matter with the same seriousness that AFL supporters treat their commitment and passions for the game.

The Author

William Westerman is a Canberra-based historian, born and raised in Melbourne. Author of several books on the First World War, he currently works at the Australian War Memorial as the author of the *Official History of Australian Operations in Iraq, 2003-2011*. He is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society and an Adjunct Lecturer at UNSW Canberra. He is a third-generation Fitzroy supporter and his two sons are, like their father, members of the Fitzroy Football Club.



Images from *Merger*

top: Fitzroy players running onto the ground in their centenary jumpers and pants before the Round 7 re-enactment game against Carlton at Princes Park, 11 May 1996 (photo provided by Jan Wright).

bottom left: Michael Nunan providing direction to his players during Fitzroy's Round 6 match against Richmond at the Whitten Oval, 4 May 1996 (AFL Photos: 25058).

bottom right: Scenes at the Whitten Oval following Fitzroy's Round 13 defeat to Geelong, 29 June 1996. Given the predicament the club found itself in, supporters were unsure whether it was to be the final time they ever saw their club play a game (*The Age/Nine Publishing* FXB918723; photographer: Vince Caligiuri).