

1873 The Beginning

The first record of Avoca participating in a game of football was found in extracts from the Avoca Mail, published on 15 July 1873:

"The next football match to come between Avoca and Maryborough will be played tomorrow on the Avoca Cricket Ground. There is much interest among the members of the respective clubs and that portion of the public who are fond of athletics and health giving sports. Owing to the remarkable closeness three former contests between the two clubs, two of which were drawn battles and the third a win for Avoca by one goal only, each side is bent on victory this time, but a cursory glance at the Maryborough names inclines us to believe that they are the stronger and heavier men, and our Avoca men will assuredly have their work cut out to the full. We believe we are right in the names of those who will constitute the players tomorrow.

B.H. Knott (Captain), Lawrence, Earl, T. Earle, W. Harris, H. Trevithick, T. Ross, Kitchen, McDonald, Knott, W. Murray, Taylor, Peterson, Curry, Macpherson, Gouge, J. Martin, Robinson and Richards.

Emergencies: Dungy, Blanchfield, Reed.

Goal Umpire: Dr. Macmahon.

Field Umpire: Mr. H. Bradshaw.

A supper of the right sort will be provided at Smith`s Avoca Hotel at the conclusion of the game, to which members only will be admitted. Tickets two shillings and six pence. We would like to see the weather a trifle more genial and, if this turns out so, there is every anticipation of a pleasant, friendly and well contested game."

Avoca won the match, kicking one goal, whilst Maryborough did not score.

[go to 1874](#)

1874

Encouraged by the success of football matches during the previous winter, enthusiasm was high in the Autumn of 1874.

The Avoca Mail reported:

"From the previous victorious efforts of the Club, this manly game is likely to be revived with fresh vigour and determination."

At a public meeting held at the Commercial Hotel on Saturday 18th April 1874, it was decided the Club should be organised on a more permanent basis.

Matches against Maryborough were arranged, and Avoca decided to wear blue shirts, in order to distinguish between the two teams.

Avoca lost the first Match, which was played at Maryborough, and there was tremendous interest in the return game, which was to be played at the Avoca Cricket Ground on Saturday 8 August 1874.

Mr. B.H. Knott, who had again been elected Avoca's captain and coach, was determined to retrieve the honours and decided to give his team a pre-match address.

Whilst his oration may have lacked the impact, and persuasion of today's coaches, it was still appropriate and inspiring.

"Gentleman, may I have your attention."

"My request is that you go out today and play the game in a spirit that will uphold the honour of Avoca".

Avoca won the game, kicking two goals and holding Maryborough scoreless.

[go to 1875](#)

1875

Mocket's Victoria Hotel, High Street, Avoca, was the venue for the pre-season meeting in 1875.

Spurred on by more than a pint or two of Ballarat Bitter, 33 members enrolled in the Club and vowed to commence practice immediately for matches against Maryborough.

Mr Casey, the Maryborough captain was present, and suggested that Avoca should add caps to their uniform.

Avoca's captain, Mr J Martin, agreed to provide his players with blue caps with white piping to match the teams light blue Guernsey shirts.

[go to 1878](#)

Clunes and Talbot were also participating in football games against Avoca.

However, the locals were particularly miffed when they were let down by Talbot.

Avoca had agreed to play Clunes at Talbot on 3 August 1878.

Because of the difficulty in transporting a full team, Talbot offered to provide Avoca with several players to make up the numbers.

Much to Avoca's disgust, the Talbot men did not turn up and, according to the Avoca mail, "inferior players were substituted and, despite some grand rushes by the Avoca boys, they failed to score".

The Mail also reported that several players had been hurt whilst playing football:

"While practising on the cricket flat on Saturday, Master George Earl fell over another player and sustained a fractured rib. The injury was purely accidental, we understand, with no rough play being indulged in at the time".

[go to 1879](#)

1879

A spirited rivalry developed between Avoca and Maryborough over the years, but their relations was seriously tested in 1879.

Playing at Maryborough on Saturday 8 July 1879, the match ended in a draw with one goal each.

However, Avoca expressed deep dissatisfaction at the manner in which they were treated.

The Maryborough men had expected to dispose of the visitors with little trouble and, when this was not accomplished, extra players joined the home side.

Five times during the match Avoca insisted that the umpire count the Maryborough players.

The sympathies of the crowd also upset Avoca, who claimed a rousing cheer greeted every Maryborough score, whilst any clever play by Avoca was hissed.

But the main complaint concerned the gate money.

Avoca had been promised one third and, although 400 people turned up, the visitors were offered only three shillings and six pence.

A prominent Maryborough resident sided with Avoca and, as the team left the ground, he handed the captain, J.B. Keenan, a guinea.

The first football fatality occurred in 1879 when Talbot youth Robert Crooks died after a match at Talbot.

The incident, and reports in local papers, caused great ill feeling between Avoca and Talbot.

The matter was resolved in court, and is detailed in chapter two.

From Chapter Two.

On July 15, 1879, the Avoca Mail reported the district's first football fatality.

It sparked a bitter row that ended in court. **A precis of the article reads**

"It is with very deep regret that we have to chronicle a most disastrous accident in connection with the football match that was played in Talbot on Saturday. It is not too much to say that the catastrophe has caused a widespread feeling of sorrow.

The Avoca players started away in high spirits, and from the good feeling that has always existed between the young men in both places an enjoyable games was expected. This anticipation was realised until a member of the Talbot team, a youth named Robert Crooks, received a heavy fall which rendered him insensible, and in that state he had to be carried home.

The game was no further proceeded with, and before the Avoca team left they heard that Mr. Crooks was somewhat better."

"On Sunday, however, a messenger arrived with the news that the youth had died that morning".

"Several accounts are given on the manner of which the accident occurred, but all agree that no one person is to blame, if blame not be incurred by all who play so rough and dangerous a game. It appears that one of the Avoca team, J.O'Farrell, had possession of the ball, which the deceased tried to get from him by a rush and a spring, and that the deceased then fell heavily upon his head causing concussion of the brain."

"We also hear that another member of the Talbot Team, named Henderson, also had his collarbone broken during the match."

However, the Talbot Newspaper was not impressed with its contemporary's version of the fatal incident, and retaliated;

"Just before the termination of the game, one Avoca player, twice the weight of the Talbot lad, threw the youth, causing brutal violence to his head. The game was marked throughout by a roughness on the part of the visitors that we have not seen equal. The brutal and unnecessary attack on the deceased was the subject of adverse comment around the ground."

Needless to say, legal action followed.

Eventually, O'Farrell, who suffered enormously by the ordeal, was entirely exonerated from blame after the jury heard favourable evidence from relatives of the deceased and "trustworthy witnesses".

Incredibly, less than a month after the case was closed, the Maryborough Advertiser added fuel to the fire.

A story promoting a match between Avoca and Maryborough expressed the hope that a good central umpire would be appointed to control the game.

The report also suggested that "a surgeon should be in attendance, and that a few grave diggers and undertaker might be useful!"

[go to 1890](#)

1890

By 1890 football was extremely popular, and a meeting at Wiltshire's Albion Hotel, High Street, Avoca resolved to form a club to be known as the Avoca & District Football Club.

A committee was formed and comprised many of the town's most prominent people.

President: J.O. (Oscar) Wiltshire

Vice Presidents: George Downton, J. Lusby, A. Ebeling.

Secretary: A.F. Paten

Treasurer: George Downton.

Two politicians, J.P. Macpherson MLC, and Robert Bowman MLA, were enticed to become Club Patrons

A membership fee was set at two shillings and six pence, and the club decided to wear skin tight yellow and black Guernseys, which were laced up in the front.

[go to 1895](#)

1895

The Annual Meeting held at the Victoria Hotel, at 8pm, on Friday 3 May 1895, is recalled as a most significant meeting for football throughout the district.

Mr A.F. Paten presided over the meeting, which decided that the Secretary should write to surrounding clubs, suggesting that a district competition be organised.

Another meeting was held on the 13th May 1895, where a set of rules was agreed on.

The secretary was authorised to procure sixteen pegs to mark out a boundary and four red and black flags for the goal umpires.

Avoca's player list in the inaugural year of competition football included:

Messrs Byrne, J. Brown, W. Brown, Catlan, Jas. Daly, Donoghue, Fairlie, Hellings, Kaye, Lambert, Mockett, Marslen, McRae, Paten, Webb, Wolstenhome, Whitley, Classen, Spiers, Zuchetti, Rodwell, Daly, O'Donnell, Reed, Hewson, Herlihy, Coffey, La Roche, Davis and Hart.

[go to 1896](#)

1896

The Avoca Free Press published an intriguing article on 8 July 1896, concerning a football match between Avoca and Carisbrook.

"Last Saturday the Avoca and Carisbrook footballers met for the first time this season on the Carisbrook ground.

The home team was victorious by kicking two goals four behinds to Avoca's three behinds.

The defeat of Avoca is mainly ascribed to their superior knowledge of football tactics, which culminated in the Umpire awarding more free kicks to Carisbrook, with the direct result above stated.

Another reason advanced for their failing to kick goals is that they were bamboozled by the colours worn by Carisbrook, being similar to those of Avoca.

The fact that the boundary flags were not provided did not enhance Avoca's chances either".

Meanwhile no excuses were necessary for the Avoca Junior side, which beat Lamplough seven goals to nil.

[go to 1905](#)