

# More than fifty years a Lion

By Adam Muyt, author of *Maroon & Blue*

Fitzroy was originally known as the Maroons but in the late 1930's adopted the gorilla as the club mascot. Supporters hated it and most saw it as a joke.

Bill Stephen, former champion player and coach: *Fitzroy people and the Fitzroy club never took kindly to the Gorillas. Gorillas was used mainly by opposition supporters really. More so than Fitzroy supporters themselves. Used in a derogatory sense. Sort of big and ugly and awkward. It gave that impression, I think.*

In 1957 a couple of club committee members had finally had enough – they wanted the Gorilla moniker changed. Bill Jacobs, broadcaster and club committeeman: *We were sitting around having a talk and Ward Stuchberry and I brought it up that the club should change the name to something better. I don't know if it was any brain wave on my part, because even then the Coburg Football Club were the Lions, but I said something like, 'Why don't we become the VFL Lions?' That's how it got picked up. So they became the Lions. Everyone was sick of the Maroons and sick of the Gorillas and they thought it might have been an emblem for success or something. It was embraced pretty readily.*

The committee spent time discussing what sort of lion symbol to adopt. Eventually they settled on a Lion *rampant*, a stylised heraldic lion standing on its back legs, body outstretched, front legs out in front, ready to pounce...or perhaps go dancing. The rampant Lion stayed in place until 1965 when a new committee was elected to run the club in the wake of several seasons of abysmal performances on the field.

George Coates, a former player and committeeman and a key figure in the merger with Brisbane, couldn't stand the rampant Lion. *It's an old Public School image of a Lion, all very English and it was all sort of poofy.*

George told the committee the club needed something that showed the club meant business, that was strong and powerful. He went to the art director at the company he ran and asked him to come up with something better. *I said to him, 'Do something with the Lion, put his foot resting on the ball or something similar'.* He came up with the design that's still the one used to this day.