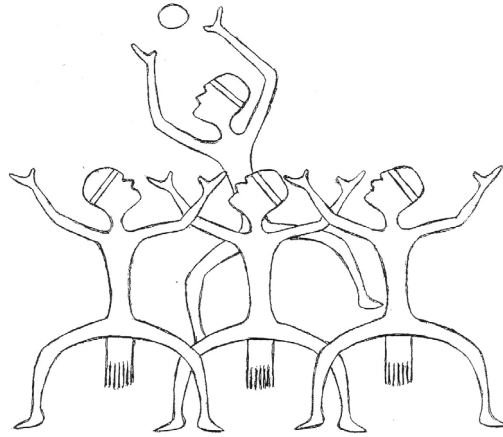


Marngrook

THE ABORIGINAL ROOTS OF AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL



MARNGROOK is the Woiwurung language word for the tribal Aboriginal game of football. It has now become the universal word used to refer to the traditional game that was played all over Australia for countless thousands of years. There were not different versions of football played from region to region as some academic historians have claimed. The rules of the game were the same across Australia, and the only difference was in the material from which the ball was made. It might be a grapefruit sized ball made of possum skin stuffed with charcoal or fur, a ball of bullrush reeds, a stuffed kangaroo scrotum, or an inflated kangaroo bladder.

It was a socially integrative game because it was not played tribe against tribe or clan against clan. Every tribe was divided into two halves, or moieties, usually represented by the totems of black cockatoo and white cockatoo, or eagle and crow. Each moiety was then further divided into two, making four skin groups. When tribes met, in order to play marngrook, they would merge and play moiety against moiety. Opponents would select each other from the skin group they had to marry into, and would match their opponent for height, weight and gender. There was no restriction on how many could play, only that you had to be an initiated man or woman. In other words, only those over aged 12 or 13.

Children played limited versions of the game called 'parndo' which was 'markers-up' or 'bidi' which was kick to kick between two groups. The object of the game was to never let the ball hit the ground, so no tackling, smothering, spoiling or standing on the mark was allowed. There were no goals and the winning side was decided by consensus after five or six hours of play. If there was no agreement on which side had won, they had to play again the next day until one side conceded that they had been defeated. Many settlers all over Australia witnessed the game and were commonly thrilled by the way players leapt on each other's backs to catch the ball spectacularly in flight. The last full intertribal game of marngrook played in Victoria was at Pound Bend in Warrandyte in 1852. Although the connection between marngrook and Australian football seems undeniable, the official AFL history strangely does deny it.