

This year, it's time to lay the ghosts of the past to rest

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When Geelong last won a flag [in 1963], I spent Grand Final day with a school friend in Norlane, listening to 3GL on a transistor in the back yard. We made two small flags, one blue and one white, and after the final siren we waved them around in the air.

That night, I was small enough to squirm through to the front of the crowd at the Geelong Town Hall to watch Polly Farmer hold the premiership cup aloft.

The cup was huge, but Polly was a giant and he waved it around in the air like a toy, while the crowd bayed and cheered.

For me as a nine year old Lara boy, winning a flag was simple and fun - and with champions like Polly, Billy Goggin, Doug Wade and Roy West there were plenty more on the way, for sure.

Now as a 53-year old Sydneysider, I feel older and wiser in all the wrong ways.

I have watched Geelong lose four Grand Finals. I was present when the Swans' Nick Davis kicked us out of the finals in 2005. I have witnessed long-lived champions like Ian Nankervis, Gary Ablett snr, Buddha Hocking and Peter Riccardi grow old and retire without so much as a single premiership medal.

And I have suffered the endless taunts from flag-sated cynics from other clubs: how can Geelong claim to be "the greatest team of all" when you haven't won a flag in 25 years – make that 30 years – make that 44?

The answer, incidentally, is easy.

Geelong's greatness lies in its traditions and provincial pride, its outstanding individual champions, its sublime team spirit.

It's a greatness of character described in that famous blue and white banner draped the length of the old Great Southern Stand: "Cool Classy Courageous Cats".

It's the greatness on display in the epic 1989 Grand Final, with Ablett's nine goals part of a tremendous comeback denied only by the clock.

But yes, I am ready to concede: now's the time for Geelong to prove greatness in the traditional way, the only absolutely convincing way, with a victory on the last Saturday of September.

So I will be driving down the Hume Highway and will watch the game with my son who, at 18, is a flagless Geelong fan.

I am sick with yearning, sleepless with anticipation. By contrast, he does not seem too worried by the unfulfilled ghosts of the past.

Maybe this is why 2007 looms as the breakthrough year.

This year, there has been a new maturity at Catland. We have been keeping a lid on it: not weighing down this brilliant 2007 side with the expectations of the past, eschewing complacency, respecting the opposition, and recognising that – until everything has been won - nothing at all has been won.

I hope it is not tempting fate to suggest that Geelong should win precisely because it has forgotten its past.

All the same, if it is Tommy Harley who holds that Cup aloft after the game, I want to be there. From Polly to Harley - it is time.

[Geelong ended the 44 year drought that day with a massive win over Port Adelaide, and two years later snatched another flag in an epic struggle against St Kilda]