



Whistle blows up past pain

Cheryl Critchley

FOLLOWING footy can be a form of insanity, with Bulldogs fans anticipating today's Qualifying Final against Geelong the longest-suffering of the lot.

A new book lifts the lid on the despair fans feel and reveals devoted Doggies have still not gotten over their 1997 preliminary final loss to Adelaide.

The Bulldogs gave up a winning position that day, and some had already queued for Grand Final tickets when the Crows snatched victory by two points.

Passion Play: Love, Hope and Heartbreak at the Footy (Hunter Publishers) reveals many fans describe that day as akin to dying.

Author and Victoria University academic Matthew Klugman, himself a mad Dog, said today's MCG clash would stir awful memories.

When the final siren sounds to end these horrific defeats,

barrackers react like the victims of a trauma, he says in the book. Despite this, Dr Klugman said his interviews with fans from most clubs found they wouldn't — or couldn't — give up hope of a 2009 premiership.

For Bulldogs fans it has been 55 years since their only flag in 1954.

That kind of battle between optimism and weariness was raging at full pitch, he said.

They could see it (a premiership) happening, but there was a realisation that they might be setting themselves up for a broken heart again.

Dr Klugman's partner, Fiona Kerr, is due to give birth around September 16 but, unlike daughter Hannah's hero, Brian Lake, they won't induce it despite the risk of missing a final.

In his book it becomes clear why he and other Bulldogs fans are so resilient.

Dogs supporters don't even need words, just a simple exchange of nods is telling enough to say,

"Brother, I know what you've been through!"

The feeling is summed up by web forum contributor, Top Dog: "Our footy club eats away at your soul, but in the process fills it with a sense of belonging and purpose to live through every day. I love the Doggies, that's all there is to it."

As for the insanity, Dr Klugman said there was something about footy that drove people to the edge and had many describing themselves as addicts.

"I think footy fans are mad in a particular kind of way but it's a self-elected madness," he said.

"It's kind of a choice.

"But it does cause people a lot of pain."

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Caption: Matt Klugman, a mad Western Bulldogs fan, and wife Fiona. Picture: REBECCA MICHAEL