

Footy is just a game, right? And the play really only lasts for two hours, so in the span of a whole week or a year, that's really not much time. So why all the fuss? Why do we talk about it, think about it, practice it, cry about it? For one thing, up here, everyone takes an interest and gets involved. Mothers, fathers, the girls and boys, uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents – they're all there. Even the dogs seem to know what the score is. There are not enough things in life that matter to everyone footy does.

Territory football, while related to Aussie Rules played in the rest of Australia, is similar but different. Its origins are hazy, but at the end of the day, what does it matter? It's next week's game that counts. As is clear in Marlow's photographs, kids learn at an early age to perfect their drop punt, handball technique, or goal kicking from tight angles. By the time they play with the big men, spectacular marks, body-jarring tackles and jumping for the centre bounce look easy and are skilfully performed. With or without boots, the honey ants, bulldogs, cats, swans and the bombers fly.

And wherever the team goes, so does the rest of the community. For each match the bus and cars are filled to capacity, travelling hundreds of kilometres to see the game.

Unfortunately, sometimes the bus has to be pushed back part of the way, but that's just how it is. Around the grounds it's sometimes quiet, with only the locals looking on, but just as often it is packed, especially at Finals time. And when the game really gets going, the crowd on the boundary yell and cheer their team on. Sometimes the mixed emotions of a game bring everyone out onto the oval after the siren, and things are sorted further.

These photographs by young Melbourne photographer, Jesse Marlow document the enthusiasm and the commitment to local footy in the bush communities. There are great moments of mateship, passion and kinship. Marlow clearly often slipped in unnoticed behind the huddle or when tactics were being discussed. The images celebrate the strength, pride and spirit of the players, as well as that of the supporters, kids, women, and the old people, who all together, give community footy such a strong place in remote indigenous life and culture. Marlow was keen to return the favour and generosity that many Territorians showed him on his trips up north, by bringing the photographs back to the places in which they were created.

*Annette Welkamp*