

# Balwyn's Bulldog – Jake Ryan

By Steve Smith

We're all familiar with that old saying "It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog" right? Well that expression could well have been written for fiery rover Jake Ryan who never takes a backward step on the field. As a survivor of the Bali Bombings in 2002, Jake's tale is an extraordinary one, transcending football and perhaps goes some way to explaining his full-on approach to his footy.

In this article I thought I'd stick to finding out about Jake the Tiger and how he has found his two years playing for the Yellow and Black.

I could never do justice to relating his Bali experience, but this story from The Age is a must for each of you reading this (after reading this interview first of course!).

<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/10/05/1065292458323.html>

**SS: You know that old saying "If they added up the votes to this point of the season [in this case YOU] would be leading the vote count", well I reckon you'd be right up there this year. You've been on fire early? Do you feel on top of your game?**

JR: Ha, not at all mate. I don't think you ever feel on top of your game, but I feel good, and been able to stay out on the track, which makes a huge difference. I played pretty sore for a lot of last year, so it's good to be fit and running and playing good footy in a super side. I'm enjoying it a lot more this year as well. We are a lot more professional and hungry for success. The boys we have brought into the club are A graders, the young boys are coming on and that makes footy a lot more enjoyable too.. and its good getting a few kicks too.. haha

**SS: How did you find your way to Balwyn from Corowa Rutherglen? Who is responsible for recruiting you?**

JR: Prenda's the man (Ian Prendergast). We knew each other through mutual friends and I was having trouble travelling with work. He got Johnno (Paul Johnson) and Harf (Daniel Harford) onto me. Harf turned up in a shocking kit, and I almost said no, but thank god I didn't judge that book by its cover, as he has been great, very welcoming and a mate now, as well as a coach.

**SS: In doing my research I also noticed you won the Morris Medal in the Ovens and Murray comp? That must have been a big buzz?**

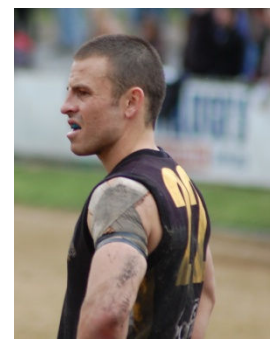
JR: It's probably been up there as my best achievement in footy. The O&M is a fantastic comp, and I had a ball travelling up there to play. It was the one season I hadn't had a bad injury. I was nice and fit and just had one of those years I wish I had when I was a few years younger. Coming off the stuff in Bali, and a shoulder reco, I felt good playing footy for the first time in about 6 years and it is something I will look back on fondly for the rest of my life.

**SS: Which other clubs have you played for in your illustrious footballing past?**

JR: I'm originally a Surfers Paradise Demon, and still wear my red and blue mouth guard. My brother still plays there and both mum and dad are life members, so I'm a Demon boy at heart. From there I went on to Sandringham in the VFL, down to Geelong on a supp list, back home to play with the Southport Sharks, couple of great years at Subiaco under Peter German, who taught me what football is all about, Corowa and now at the mighty Balwyn Tigers.

**SS: How have you found your two years at Balwyn – enjoyed it?**

JR: I have very much and hopefully we can keep this group together now and really build a culture that will carry this footy club along long term. Last year was tough as I came in mid way, there was a few blokes who were probably over it, and we wasted a pretty good opportunity to win a flag. But this year has been amazing. Brought in not only good players, but great people, and that's what successful footy clubs, and footy cultures are built on. We have had a huge pre-season, and are really working to fine-tune a system that will carry us through the year, and hopefully what could be the start of a great era for the Balwyn Football Club. I love the supporters too. J. R. is so good to me, he even puts my initials down on the far wing every home game..



Bring it on!



Leave it to me Harf

**SS: I think your excellent form in the middle has created another side benefit for the Tigers. Roc Harry has been forced to play a sweeping role across the backline, which he is doing brilliantly. Do you want to apologise to Roc for forcing him out of the guts?**

*JR: haha.. I don't know about that, but the Roc man, looks pretty good down there. His pace and kicking has been great, and he is great at changing the angles and attacking up the middle, so he has been handy down there. Pete Summers and Rennie (Gilchrist) have been fantastic. You can throw Charlie (Hendrie) in there, then the old men (Allan) Murray and (Joel) Smith, and I'm happy just to get a handball off them now and then. Except Joel, he never handballs!*

**SS: The stereotypical ruckman is a big lumbering bloke, that is not usually that smart. That's what us smaller rover-types love to say anyway! Ryan Boyce is another who has started the year well. Does he fit the ruckman stereotype?**

*JR: He certainly fits that bill. Straight out of the mould. But he has been sensational big Boycey. He is jumping and competing better than anyone, and hasn't lowered his colours at all. He even looks to handball now which makes it a lot easier, cause I don't have to swear at him now.*

**SS: You would be the most meticulous at the club in terms of warming up I reckon. We get tired just watching you run around in the breaks between the Twos game! Have you always had such a thorough routine?**

*Haha. I have. I suppose it's happened for years now, and I have to do a bit more the older I get.. Obviously after Bali and some of the injuries I sustained they are ongoing, and I have lingering niggles from those. So it's not only games but training too, I need to make sure I'm nice and loose or I put myself in danger of tearing something, or not giving myself the best chance to play well, and I get sooky if I don't play well.*

**SS: And what sort of music is thumping through your iPod? What are you listening to these days?**

*JR: Its an interesting mix I've been caught with Taylor Swift on there, but anything from rap, rock and even a bit of midnight oil.. If Normy (Nick Smith) gets hold of it, it's all dance.*

**SS: I also noticed you had one of those miracle bands on your wrist – do you reckon it works? What is it supposed to do for you exactly?**

*JR: Don't know, ask stretchy (Guy) Richards. It's supposed to stop you falling over, but I still come off dirty, so mine must be broken!*

**SS: I heard you celebrated a birthday recently – if I may be so bold to ask, how old are you now?**

*JR: 29 mate, and not happy at all about it. I'm still not as old as Joel, Shamo (Seamus Billings), Prenda, Budge (Allan Murray) and the big Dutch (Ben Holland)... I hope my rig looks as good as Dutchy's at 37 - which he just turned.*

**SS: Would getting old be a reason for you getting fired up on the field, or have you always had a bit of whiteline fever?**

*JR: No I think I've always had some issues on that front, but I play good footy when I'm up and about, so I like firing up a bit. It's 2 hours a week where you can go out and compete, and give all you have. I take my footy pretty seriously.*

*After my experiences in Bali and seeing and knowing guys that played footy who never came home, or are unable to play anymore, I make sure I go out and give everything I have every week. I still wear my black arm band in tribute to all those 202 people who didn't come home, and if it's getting tough out there I only need a glance at it, and realise it could be a lot worse, so you grit the teeth and take 'em on.*



*Jake bangs one through at the Bullring*



*No time to chat fellas, Jake's doing his pre-warm-up warm-up!*



*US Forces give the nod...*



**SS: Speaking of whiteline fever, you had a run-in with the notorious Robbie Ross of Vermont recently. What sweet nothings did you say to each other out there?**

*JR: Well I wouldn't say he was notorious for starters. He likes to lip as well, he told me he owned a house; I said you can rent one of my 3... bit of friendly banter.. No he is a good player at this level, and they will be back no doubt this year. He can say what he wants. I just want to win flags.*

**SS: What do you do for a crust Jake?**

*JR: I work for domain.com.au which is the real estate website owned by Fairfax. Been there 4 years now, and have a super job, so I'm very lucky. It's a lot easier to use than realestate.com.au, so make sure you go to my website first!*

**SS: By the look of your hairless legs, you are either a serious cyclist or just love shaving! Which is it?**

*JR: I'm OK on the bike, but I just like shaving them. They look better in your photos, especially if they are oiled up, and it's always good if there's a few girls sneaking round in the crowd.. ha. I don't go to the solarium like our skipper Nick Smith, or Pete Summers though.*

**SS: Bowdo gave me a straight bat in terms of a prediction for this year. How do you think we're placed at this early stage?**

*JR: We were looking pretty good till the weekend. I think if we get back to our core values and back to the processes we have put in place, we can win the comp this year, no doubt. We had a tremendous pre-season, we have a great core group of players who are hungry for success. This is a tough comp with proud clubs that we need to get over, but if we are fair dinkum and get back to our brand, and what we want to be known as, then they will have to be good to beat us.*

**SS: How do you find playing under Daniel Harford? Is there a difference between Harf as coach only and last year when he was player coach?**

*JR: Harf's been great. He's let the senior group take a lot of ownership and direction in what we have done this year. That's great as it has empowered the group to be tougher on each other. We have to take more responsibility as a playing group. He keeps it nice and simple, and puts a lot of faith in his players which gives you confidence when you go out to play. I miss his hangers in the goal square, I miss his freak goals and I miss the fact that I could be 10 metres away and still give him a pat on the ass due to its fair size.. Seriously, he could still play, but he's been good and I bet like us players he is learning up there every week as well..*

**SS: You've obviously experienced a hell of a lot in your life. What message would you give to the younger guys in the club reading this?**

*JR: Firstly don't do weights too young, it stunts your growth. I think you need to enjoy it. If you're not having fun, you won't put the work in and you won't get a kick. I always looked at the players I wanted to be like. I would see what they did, then I would go and do it more often and try and do it better. I was always told the harder you work, the luckier you get, and I think that's pretty true. I think you can apply that to all facets of life too, not just footy. I think after Bali I learnt the most important thing is your family and friends. The more you have and the closer you are, the easier it is to deal with any situation. Also to remember that when you think you're going bad, there is always someone out there doing it a lot harder than you. Make the most of every opportunity, and if you can't be good, be good at it. My dad Stinger always used to say that to me.*

**SS: And finally Jake, is there a Mrs Ryan out there that you would like to acknowledge with an appreciative message?**

*JR: There is a Mrs Ryan... My mum Leanne. She is my best mate, and has been my rock through everything. She's down for the Noble game, you won't miss her, she can be vocal at times. But I love her very much. Love you mum xx. I would love to say there are plenty of Mrs Ryans out there, but Smithy, a gentleman never kisses and tells... I'm not a gentleman. I just have nothing to report. The young boys have got me covered now.. I used to go alright ha-ha*



"What's that Robbie?  
Say it to my good ear!"



"I'm still here!"



Tough day at the office



Still running





*Yellow and blaaaaack!!!*



*"Say something Harf" - Caring for the coach up at East Ringwood*



*Geez, where did they come from?*



*Can't I even get a rub-down in peace?*



*Putting on the 'game face' ready to go*



*Always got time for the fans*



*Time for plan B*



*Having a spell after another good day at the office*



*Mine!!!*



*More ice...*