

# Specky Magee



& the battle of the  
young guns



**Felice Arena &  
Garry Lyon**



# **Specky Magee**

苏卡学院图书馆  
& the battle of the young guns

***Felice Arena &  
Garry Lyon***

Puffin Books

## PUFFIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Group (Australia)

250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia

(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty Ltd)

Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA

Penguin Group (Canada)

90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Canada ON M4P 2Y3

(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Books Ltd

80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL England

Penguin Ireland

25 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland

(a division of Penguin Books Ltd)

Penguin Books India Pvt Ltd

11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ)

67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand

(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd

24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank, Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London, WC2R 0RL, England

First published by Penguin Group (Australia), 2009

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Text copyright © Red Wolf Entertainment Pty Ltd and Gamel Sports Media Pty Ltd, 2009

The moral right of the authors has been asserted.

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

Cover design by John Canty and Brad Maxwell © Penguin Group (Australia)

Author and cover photographs by John Tsiavis, additional photography by John Canty

Statue of Leigh Matthews by Louis Laumen

Typeset in 12/18 New Baskerville by Post Pre-press Group, Brisbane, Queensland

Printed and bound in Australia by McPherson's Printing Group, Maryborough, Victoria

Colour separation by Splitting Image

National Library of Australia

Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

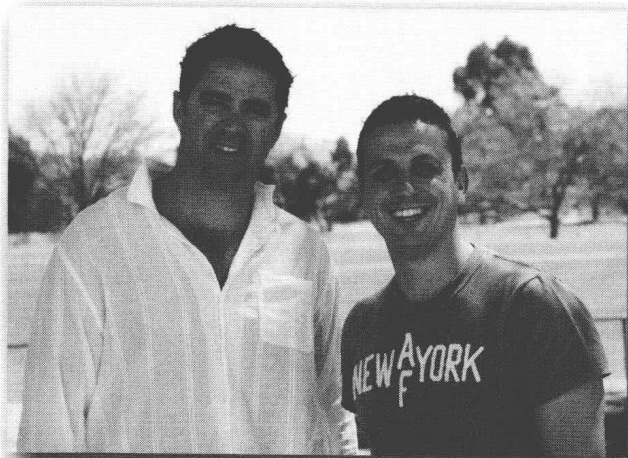
Arena, Felice.

Specky Magee and the battle of the young guns / Felice Arena, Garry Lyon.

ISBN: 978 0 143 30466 1 (pbk.)

A823.3

puffin.com.au



G'day all!

Specky is back! Woo-hoo! It's been a long couple of footy seasons since the last book, so we've packed this latest with the best of everything you'd expect from a Specky Magee novel. Only there's more! More footy action, more drama, more romance (ew!), more comedy (Danny and Robbo are up to their old tricks) and even more mystery (who is that dude following Specky?).

But whilst we've had a fun time creating and writing these stories, there's an entire team busily working hard behind the scenes to make sure these books make it to you. Like Specky, we value teamwork. It inspires us to 'put in the hard yards' and be the best we can be. We want to shout out a massive thanks to Michelle Madden, Laura Harris, Kristin Gill, Sally Bateman, Julia Ferracane, John Canty and all the other talented folk at Penguin. This is a team we're very proud to be part of.

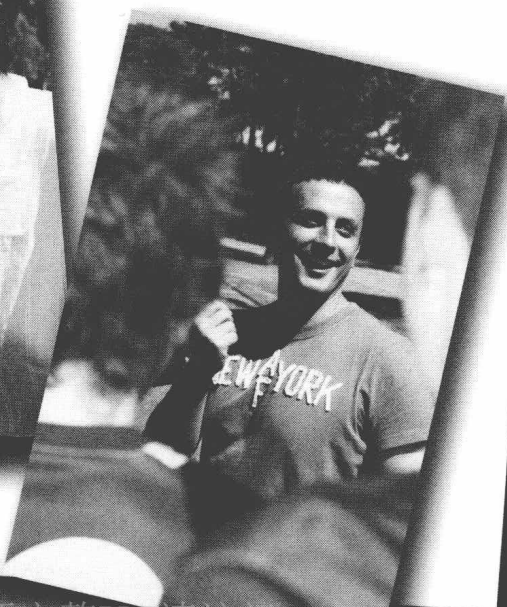
So, welcome back, loyal Specky fans. And welcome to new readers if this is your first book. We hope you enjoy this story as much as we enjoyed writing it.

As you can tell we're a little excited about this one and we're finding it hard to 'keep a lid on it'. So kick off your boots, get comfortable and enjoy *Specky Magee and the Battle of the Young Guns*.

Felice and Garry

Two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature, on the left, is 'Felice Arena' and the second, on the right, is 'Garry Magee'.

P.S. For all the latest news about all things Specky, remember to check in at [www.speckymagee.com](http://www.speckymagee.com) or [www.felicearena.com](http://www.felicearena.com)



## **1. a closer look**

The plane touched down and taxied towards the terminal.

‘Welcome to Adelaide . . .’ The captain’s voice echoed through the speakers. ‘The temperature this afternoon is a very pleasant twenty degrees Celsius. The local time is one-forty p.m. Once again, we welcome the international travellers who joined us in Victoria and apologise for the delay we experienced at Melbourne Airport. Thank you for flying with us and we hope you enjoy your stay in South Australia.’

As the plane jolted to a halt, there was a wave of frenzied motion: passengers unbuckled their belts, jumped to their feet, and reached for their bags in the overhead lockers. At the front of



the plane, in business class, a bald man in a suit moved to the door to make sure he was first to exit.

Almost jogging, he hurried to the baggage carousels. While he was impatiently waiting for his luggage to appear, his mobile rang.

‘Hello,’ he said. ‘Yes! Just got here . . . I don’t know, but I hope so. It’ll be good to finally get a look at him. No, I’m gonna check into my hotel first – drop off my bag. Which, by the way, has just appeared on the belt . . . Okay, yep, talk to you later.’

He grabbed his bags, jogged to the hire-car counter and picked up his keys. Then he drove out of the airport parking lot as if he were in the final lap of a grand prix.



Bursting into his hotel room, the man tossed his bag on the bed and switched on the TV. His mobile rang again.

‘Hello. Yes, I’m here. Look, I can’t talk now – they’re telecasting the game . . . When I checked in, I asked for directions to the

ground and the porter said it's being aired live on Cable.' As he spoke, the bald man frantically clicked through the channels. 'Here it is! Found it! I don't believe it – I think that's him on screen right now! I'm telling you, this kid is the real deal – I know there are no guarantees in this caper, but this lad might be the best prospect I've ever laid eyes on. Yeah . . . Trust me on this one. Talk later.'

The man dropped his phone and turned up the volume to hear the commentary . . .



## 2. courage



*. . . and here he is again – young Simon Magee for the Vics – about to have his fifth shot at goal. He hasn't quite had his kicking boot on today, managing two goals and two behinds, but the boy has lived up to all the hype surrounding him over the past week.*

*I agree, Jim. This kid has been one of the stars of this Under-Fifteen national football carnival. He didn't have this problem two days ago when the Big V smashed the boys from Tasmania. His six-goal display was the standout performance of the week, and right now he's the equal leading goal-kicker of the entire carnival. And we're in for a bit of a shoot-out because right now, at the other end of the ground, the big lad from Western Australia, Mitch Mahoney,*

*has four goals for the game and has drawn level with young Magee.*

*You're dead right, Brian. Magee starts his run-up . . . He's only thirty metres out, on a slight angle, and if he kicks this one he'll take the outright lead again. He makes good contact – it looks good . . . but no! It just drifts off line, and he has to settle for a behind. And there goes the siren, with the Vics leading Western Australia by just seven points, with the winner to take on South Australia in the National Final in three weeks' time. And remember that the Final is a curtain-raiser to the biggest game of the AFL season, and one of the biggest sporting events in the country, the AFL Grand Final. What an opportunity for these young boys!*

Specky kicked at the ground, disappointed that he had missed such an easy shot.

'Don't worry, Speck. Get the next one.'

His good mate, Brian Edwards, was the first of his team-mates to offer his encouragement.

As the two jogged towards the three-quarter-time huddle, the rest of the team joined Brian in supporting Specky, and urged each other on.

‘Come on, boys. One last quarter and we’ll be playing on the G on Grand Final Day.’

‘Thirty more minutes and we get the chance to be National Champions.’

‘Suck it in, fellas! Biggest quarter of our lives coming up.’

Playing for Victoria was everything Specky had hoped it would be. The most talented Under-Fifteen footballers from around the State had come together to play under the legendary junior football coach Jay ‘Grub’ Gordan. Specky couldn’t believe how lucky he was to be playing at this level. He was used to being the best in his team, but here he was testing himself against elite young footballers from around the country and playing alongside the best of the best.

‘Righto, settle down. Get a drink and listen up,’ ordered Grub.

The chatter stopped immediately. All eyes focused on the short, grey-haired coach with the gravelly voice who had, in the space of a couple of weeks, united this group into a tight-knit team, prepared to do whatever he asked of them.

‘Geez, Simon,’ he said, frowning. ‘How did you miss that? Don’t lean so far back when you make contact.’

Specky and his team-mates had learnt early on that they needed a thick skin to play under Grub. He was direct – pulled no punches – but was always constructive with his criticism.

‘We’re not gonna let these sandgropers take away our spot on the MCG!’ another voice boomed. ‘Come on, dig deep! Find something! Don’t let the Big V down!’

Specky smiled. It was Dicky Atkins, a tough kid from Gippsland. He was a mountain of a boy, who already had hair on his massive chest. Sometimes Specky wondered if Dicky wasn’t really an eighteen-year-old posing as a fourteen-year-old. No one took playing for Victoria more seriously than Dicky. He was the spirit of their side, constantly encouraging and supporting his mates. He never shut up on the ground, barking instructions and always giving 110%. He was, by far, the most popular member of the side, and his attitude set the tone for the rest of the team – especially when he was roaring encouragement at the top of his lungs.

‘Okay, this is what we’re going to do,’ announced Grub. ‘We’re kicking into a slight breeze and we know that they’ll kick the ball to Mahoney every time they go inside fifty. Dicky has done a fantastic job keeping Mahoney to just four goals, but we’re going to give him a little support.’

Grub turned to Specky.

‘Magee, I want you to play at half-back. We watched tapes through the week of Luke Hodge and the role he plays at Hawthorn. Well, I want you to do a similar job here.’



Specky was very familiar with the role that Luke Hodge had played in Hawthorn’s Premiership victory. Luke’s coach, Alastair Clarkson, had moved him from the centre of the ground, where he was one of the best mid-fielders in the competition, to the half-back line. It made it much more difficult for opposition clubs to tag him. In the process, Hodge was able to patrol the back line, reading the play expertly and, at the right time, leave his opponent and ‘zone off’ to help out his fellow defenders. Because he was such a beautiful kick, he was able to set up many of Hawthorn’s attacking moves from the back line.

Opposition clubs really struggled to stop his influence, so much so that he went on to win the Norm Smith Medal as the best player on the ground. Specky knew that half-back had become one of the most important positions on the ground and he was excited about the challenge Grub had given him.

'You've still got responsibility for your opponent,' added Grub. 'But wherever possible I want you to get back in front of Mahoney and help out as much as you can.'

Grub finished his address and the team broke up and headed to their positions for the final quarter knowing that their shot at the National title at the MCG was at stake.



*There's no doubt about Grub Gordan, Jimbo. He's swung another surprise. It looks as if young Magee is lining up at half-back. Why would he do that when Magee leads the goal kicking for the carnival and the Vics are only seven points up?*

The commentators, Brian Paylor and Jim Bradshaw, were treating this game as seriously as any AFL match.



*He's always done it, Brian. He doesn't want these boys becoming one-position players early in their careers. He likes to play them at both ends.*

Specky found himself matched up on a much smaller half-forward flanker, Dylan Haddon.

The Western Australian runner came sprinting out to the nippy little player.

'Coach wants you to play out wide, drag Magee out of the play,' he said, in earshot of Specky. 'He doesn't care if you don't get a kick, just make sure *he* doesn't.'

Specky's opponent nodded, and immediately ran towards the boundary line, but Specky – remembering what Grub had said about the role of the 'sweeper' – only followed him halfway to the boundary. He turned and saw Dicky standing shoulder to shoulder with Mitch Mahoney – the great Western Australian hope – bumping into him and chattering into his ear. They were the



only two players inside the Vics' defensive fifty.

Right, thought Specky. I've got to stay close enough to Dicky that I can get back and cut off any passes to Mahoney, but I've also got to keep a close eye on Haddon.



*The Vics have dominated the first seven minutes of the quarter, Brian. I don't think the sandgropers have gone inside fifty yet.*

Specky was enjoying his view of the game from the half-back flank. He hadn't been called upon to do anything yet and that was fine by him. The mid-field were in control, led by Brian and the Vics' rover, 'Bear' Gleeson, but they hadn't made it pay on the scoreboard. They still led by only nine points.



*The ball's kicked in from full-back and is marked strongly by Western Australia – beautiful quick hands! And they're out in space, bouncing down the wing. This is the big chance for the boys from the West. Where is Mahoney? They'll be looking for him!*

Specky quickly looked to Haddon, his blond opponent. He was standing close to the boundary, not really interested in calling for the ball. Specky made a split-second decision. He left him and headed towards Dicky and Mitch Mahoney.



*Mahoney goes one way and then the other, and now he makes his lead. Oh no! Atkins has stumbled. Mahoney's in the clear and that's where the ball is going.*

Specky saw Dicky trip and ran harder, back with the flight of the ball. He could see that Dicky was not going to get there to make the spoil – it was all down to him now.



*It's a beautiful pass and Mahoney's in the clear. Look out! Who's that?*

At full stretch, with eyes on the ball, Specky dived – all the time aware that big Mitch Mahoney was hurtling towards him. His fist