

OXFORD AUSTRALIA
**WORD
OF THE
MONTH**

May 2011

Lemons

– noun: AFL three-quarter time. Rugby half-time

Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary 5th Edition

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The story behind the Word of the Month

One of the traditions of Australian Rules Football, now largely disappeared, was the eating of quartered oranges on the field at three-quarter time. These days, blood-sugar levels are more likely to be raised by lollies and sports drinks than by quartered oranges with the skin still on. If we go further back into the history of the AFL, we discover that instead of oranges, the players were provided with **lemons**.

In the earliest evidence, three-quarter time is described as **lemon time**. Here is some of the earliest evidence:

The only material result was a behind, so that at **lemon time** the seashiders, who looked a beaten team, were only three points behind. (*South Australian Register* (Adelaide) 23 May 1898)

At **lemon time** Fred [the umpire] was refused a **lemon** by the South's man with the bag, and had to be supplied through the kindness of a South player. (*Sunday Times* (Perth) 9 July 1905)

Soon after the introduction of the term **lemon time** it was reduced, in popular speech, to **lemons**:

Pictures, were also taken while the play was in progress at various points, and when both teams were at **lemons**. (*Barrier Miner* (Broken Hill) 28 August 1906)

The third term provided the same class of football, and at **lemons** Prospect had increased their score by three goals. (*Register* (Adelaide) 25 July 1910)

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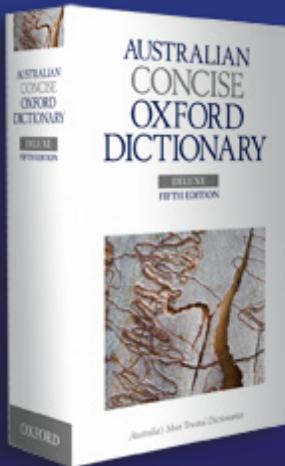
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City led by nine points at **lemons**, and held the advantage till the finish, winning by 22 points. (*Examiner* (Launceston) 17 June 1931)

These AFL terms were transferred to Rugby. By 1923 there is evidence of **lemon time** being used in Rugby for the half-time break, and by 1934 **lemons** was also being used:

Coorparoos put on a penalty goal and a try, both by Thorogood, and at **Lemon time** were leading by 7 points to 2. (*Longreach Leader* 21 September 1923)

It was a great try. Steggall could not put his side ahead when his kick went wide. Ivanhoes 3, Brothers 3. The score board was unchanged at '**lemons**'. (*Cairns Post* 21 May 1934)

At some stage the **lemons** were replaced by oranges. It is not clear when this happened, for the substitution of citrus fruits was blithely ignored by both codes, and the break continued to be called **lemons**.

The term **lemons** is still occasionally heard in AFL and Rugby, but it is becoming more and more rare. It is a glimmer of a simpler world of sport.