Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus (61-c.113 CE), better known to us as Pliny the Younger, was a prominent lawyer, magistrate, politician, author, and epistolarian in Ancient Rome. There is a short letter, catalogued as Book 9, Letter 6, to his friend Calvisius in which Pliny pours scorn on the chariot races. This poem, set in the present day, echoes Pliny's letter, substituting Australian football for chariot racing …

Showdown

Ah, Pliny, dear friend! Things still are the same.
In two thousand years, there's nothing that's changed.
Now that the great unwashed are at the game,
I've time for books with peace from fans deranged.

Our Oval cannot match your Circus[1] size.
And I've no interest in the play that's called.
There's nothing I've not seen before to prize,
And yet the crowd is childishly enthralled.

If they admired offensive players' skills,
Or thrilled at fearsome contests for the ball,
Then one could understand their passions' ills.
But just team colours are for them the all.

If Butters' strip and Dawson's swapped mid play
Then those who'd cheered for Zak[2] now boo their man.
The vulgar herd wears their colours on display,
But each tunic itself is worth more than the fan!

continued overleaf / 2 …

[1] *The Circus Maximus, as extended by Nero, held 250,000 spectators, according to Pliny the Elder, HN. xxxvi. (24)102*
[2] *'Port Adelaide' is captained by Zac Butters and 'Adelaide' by Jordan Dawson; the "derby" match between these two teams is called "The Showdown"*

It’s amazing though that civic worthies cheer,
Demeaning themselves with such common a game.
I congratulate myself that I’m austere.
I can devote my time to more worthy aims.

Farewell!

© 7 August 2026, Alan John Branford