



# LIFE MEMBER

## Roy Henry ("Foss") Foster

6 July 1921–17 February 2002



Roy Foster was born in Geelong and educated at Chilwell State School and Geelong Junior Technical School. He played football for East Geelong and for Newtown and Chilwell. He also played cricket. After leaving school, Roy was apprenticed to Mr Hilliam, a boot-maker in LaTrobe Terrace.

Roy joined the RAAF during the Second World War aged 19 (see Chapter 10). After serving overseas he was stationed in Ballarat as RAAF boot repairer. It was there that he met Joy Watts, a WAAF corporal. They met again at the Palais in Geelong after the war and were married in 1946.

When Mr Hilliam retired, Roy bought his business. Joy says there were about 70 boot-makers in Geelong at that time, but Roy had a level of expertise that made him stand out. He could make delicate ladies' shoes with high heels and fine soles and could cut the fine rim that edged the sole. In 1953, Roy was asked to be the boot-studder for GFC. Joy says GFC paid £4 per week from which he had to pay his own expenses but he enjoyed it and they made lifelong friends at the football club.<sup>1</sup> Peter Menzies explains that being the GFC boot-

studder was a lot of work in those days.

On Saturdays and training days (Tuesday and Thursday), the boot-studder would hand out the boots to the players, then during the game he would replace studs if necessary, clean off the mud with a wire brush, and dry the boots.<sup>2</sup> Each player would have about three pairs of boots and sometimes the seconds and thirds brought theirs as well! After the game Roy would take the boots home. Russ Middlemiss says:

I can still see Roy and his kids dragging the football boots home after a game in the mud to dry them off. He used to have to make big stops for wet ground, and shorter stops for drier ground. But they didn't have to change them too often because Kardinia Park in those days was a bog heap.<sup>3</sup>



Geelong Advertiser. 4 Sept. 1965



Leather football stops

The stops were built up from small pieces of leather. Brian Brushfield recalls that his father, a leather trader, used to sell leather to Roy for the stops.

Joy says they would have the fire going all night to keep the room warm and dry the boots. 'You couldn't have them too close to the fire or the leather would get too hard. Roy would get up during the night to stoke the fire.'

The laces were washed to get rid of the mud. If the weather was fine, Roy's sons Robert and Allan would tie the laces together and hang the boots on the clothes line to dry. Then the boots would have to be polished.

One time Roy burnt his hand badly, so the GFC players rallied around to help. Colin Barton told him how to care for the burn, while Bruce Peake and Cliff Palmer polished the boots. (Ironically, it was Joy who usually polished the boots, not Roy!) Roy umpired practise matches and was also a runner for coaches Reg Hickey and Bob Davis. Bob Davis once sent Roy to tell Doug Wade—the star full forward—to come off. When Roy returned to the bench, Bob Davis asked, 'Well, what did he say?' Roy said, 'I take messages out. I don't bring them back.'

During the first final at the MCG, Joy recalls the players' boots were as shiny underneath as they were on top. Then the players ran out onto the ground—into six inches of water and mud. Like the trainers, Roy was regarded by the players

as part of the team and was invited to go on the players' trip to America. When they arrived in San Francisco to play an exhibition match, umpire Harry Beitzel wasn't there. Bob Davis asked Roy to umpire. Roy was dressed ready to go out when Harry Beitzel appeared. Joy says 'He was never so pleased to see anybody! But he wished afterwards he'd bounced the ball to start the game.'

Roy was made a life member of Geelong Football Club in 1969.

After Roy retired in 1974 he coached basketball and umpired cricket. He joined the Past Players and Officials Association and was President from 1985 to 1989. The past players had talked about getting their own rooms, but Roy Foster realised the dream. Within two years of his becoming President, the rooms were set up and opened.

Roy was well-known as a great story-teller. Peter Menzies says men who didn't come into the clubrooms for a drink would come just to hear Roy. Roy's son Allan said they had heard all of dad's jokes—he tried them out at home first. Joy remembers when their sons were playing for the Amateurs, Maurie Fields was booked as a comedy act. The audience chanted: 'We want Foss'<sup>4</sup>

Roy died in 2002 aged 80. His funeral was attended by hundreds including many Geelong Football Club players.<sup>5</sup>

### Sources

- 1 Joy Foster talking to Susan Kruss, 28 March 2013
- 2 Peter Menzies talking to Susan Kruss, March 2013
- 3 Russ Middlemiss, interviewed by Susan Kruss, 22 Nov. 2012
- 4 Joy Foster talking to Susan Kruss, 28 March 2013
- 5 Interview with Joy Foster, 11 March 2013, *Geelong Advertiser* 16 March 2002, p.31