



LIFE MEMBER

Leslie Frederick ("Les") Laver

9 December 1900–9 January 1982

Les Laver was the first Secretary of the Geelong Past Players and Officials Association, Vice-President 1953–65 and committee member from 1933 to 1966. He was made a life member in 1967.

Les was born in Melbourne. He was captain of Hampton Football Club before coming to Geelong in 1925. Les played eight senior games for Geelong in 1926 and 1928, and had a final unexpected appearance at an away game against South Melbourne on 8 June 1931. The *Geelong Advertiser* reported 'Laver's appearance on the field surprised supporters of the Geelong team ... it was considered that the conditions would suit Laver's style of play.¹ Col Hutchinson writes:

Although his senior career was brief, Les gave great service to the club at seconds (reserves) level, being captain-coach (1928–32) and non-playing coach (1933–40), guiding the team to premierships in 1930 (undefeated champions) and 1937–38. He filled in briefly as coach of the GFC seniors following Reg Hickey's resignation early in the 1940 season. Les was a member of the GFC general committee from 1946 to 1950 and was a keen advocate for the

formation of an Under-19 team to take part in the Third Eighteen competition.²

In 1947 Les Laver and Fred Hawking were appointed as joint coaches of the inaugural GFC Thirds (Under-19s) team. He continued in the role until the end of 1950, with the team reaching third on the ladder one year and runners-up in another.³

Les married Dorothy May Voigt (known as May) in October 1926. They had two daughters. He established his own business (L.F. Laver Pty Ltd) as the Geelong agent for Brockhoffs (biscuits), Griffiths Sweets (black crows for sore throats), Osolite flour, Cottees cordials and others. He supplied shops in Geelong and surrounding beachside towns. As the business grew he would often hire young footballers and also took in school leavers to work in the warehouse over Christmas. His daughter, Margaret Blair, says they wanted to work for Les because he paid well and was always fair.⁴

When Ron Hovey started playing with the

Under-19s he went to work for Les for four or five years. Ron says Les Laver was 'a marvellous man ... all the advice Les gave me—you never forget. He was a great man and a great member of the Geelong Football Club.'⁵

Margaret remembers going to Corio Oval to watch the football as soon as she was old enough to walk, with her mother and the pram (with her baby sister). At that time the seconds played alternate Saturdays at Corio Oval – the firsts played on the other Saturdays. She remembers watching her father run out onto the ground at Corio Oval, and says 'My dad wasn't a big man. He would have only been 5 foot 10 or 11. He was broad and he was solid but he had very short legs.'

Later, when Geelong Football Club moved to Kardinia Park, the family had tickets in the Brownlow Stand. After Les finished coaching the seconds, the family would go to watch the firsts play.

In 1942, aged 42, Les enlisted in the Second World War and fought in Bougainville and Borneo (see Chapter 10).

Margaret remembers that Les was never home for the evening meal. He was either away travelling or at football training or meetings:

As we got older, dad would come home late on footy nights. Naturally, he'd probably had a few drinks. We would sit up to all hours until he came home and he would talk to us about football ... He was a man's man. He was very easy, very placid. He was very popular ... He would have loved sons but they didn't happen.⁶

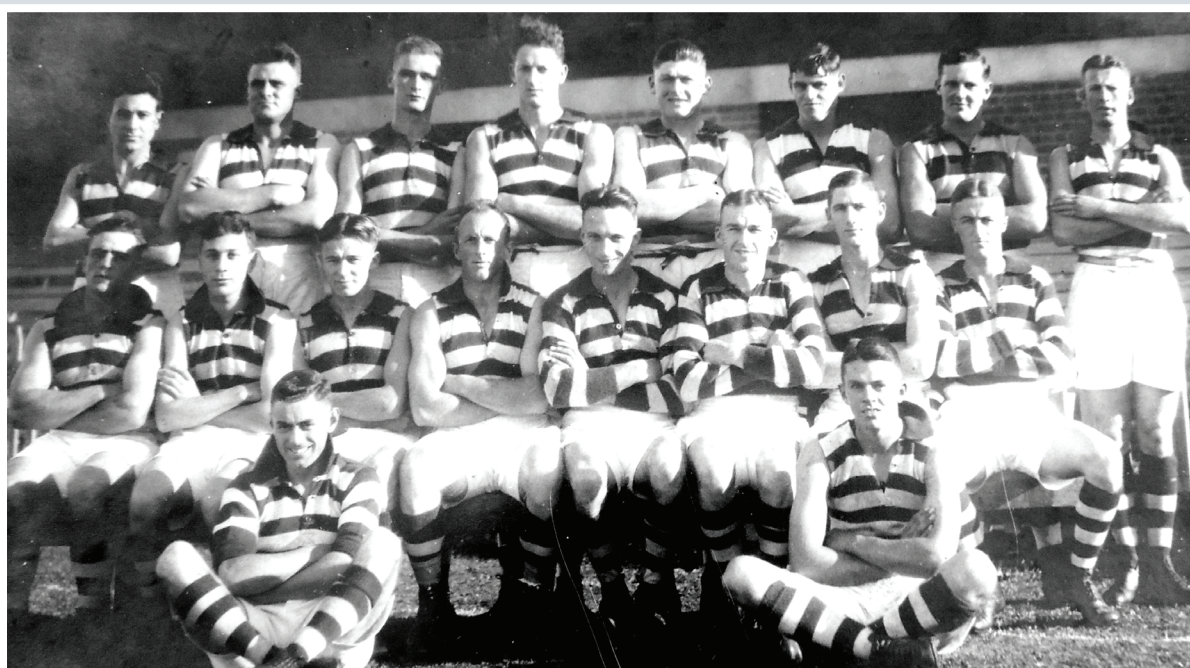
Les retired from business aged 78. Six weeks later his wife had a stroke, and for the rest of his life Les took care of her, only going out very occasionally. Margaret says he was completely lost as he was used to being with people both in his business and at the footy club. Les died before his wife, who then came to live with Margaret and her husband.⁷



May and Les Laver with grandchildren c.1959



Coin Toss, 1930s



1931 reserves team, Les Laver, fourth from left, seated captain/coach

Sources

- 1 Hutchinson, C. *Cats' Tales*, pub. by Geelong Advertiser Pty Ltd 1984, p.55
- 2 *Geelong Football Club Souvenir History Book*, 1951, p.29
- 3 Email from Col Hutchinson to Susan Kruss, March 2012
- 4 Margaret Blair, talking to Susan Kruss, 8 March 2012
- 5 Ron Hovey, talking to Susan Kruss, 11 Dec. 2012
- 6 Margaret Blair, talking to Susan Kruss, 8 March 2012
- 7 Margaret Blair, talking to Susan Kruss, 8 March 2012