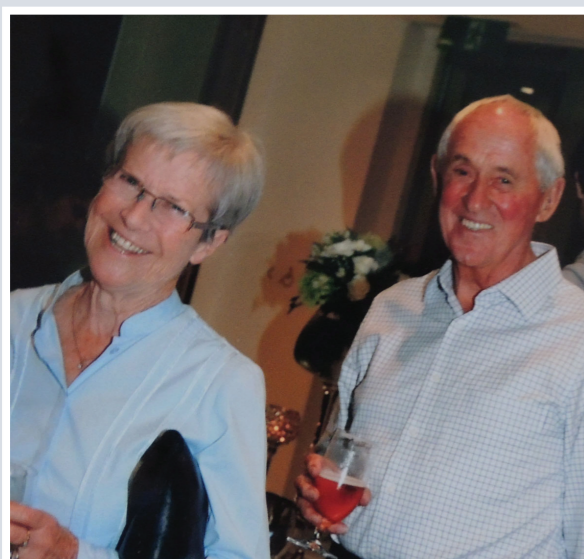




# LIFE MEMBER

## Leo Patrick McDonald

15 November 1934—



Moya and Leo McDonald

Leo McDonald was born in Geelong. The family lived at Munday's Tannery (owned by player Jim Munday's father). To get to St Bernard's school, Leo's father would row the children across the river, then they walked across Belmont Common. Leo left school aged 14 and worked pea-picking, milking cows at Apollo Bay, a couple of years at International Harvester with players Arthur Irvine and Ron Lunn, then at the Valley Mill and the woolstores.

In 1955, he went to National Service training at Port Fairy. Martin Burke, Norm Sharp and a couple of other Geelong players were there. Leo was the tallest, so he was the right-hand marker in the company. Leo, who was playing with St Albans, asked the Geelong players if he could train with them for a few weeks to improve his fitness. Doug Davies was the reserves captain/coach that year and he agreed to let Leo train. At one of the intra-club practise matches, Leo remembers:

Barry Whelan was roving to the team I was in and Dougie Davies was roving to what he called the best ruckman. The first half we absolutely killed them. Barry'd be where I'd tell him to be—he was a

great little rover. When we came out after half-time, Dougie Davies put himself on my team. Dougie's saying, 'Hit it here.' I said, 'No, look...' We had a bit of a—he didn't like to be told, so I didn't make the list that year.<sup>1</sup>

The next year Leo played with the reserves. Then Tom Morrow became coach and Leo played with the reserves again in 1957. He says Tom Morrow was a very good mentor for the young players. Leo says in those two years he was selected for about 18 games, quite often as 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> man, though he often got to play. He says:

I'd get a phone call to come in on Saturday, 'You're first ruck against Collingwood' or something like that. ... I never thought of myself as a good footballer at all, even though ... to even get on the list you have to be some sort of footballer. But in those days, the 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> man had to cut up the oranges at three-quarter time ... and I could cut them more perfectly into quarters than anyone else. They didn't have to look to find the biggest piece. So that's why I was 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> man. That's my story.

At that time Leo was working at Tullamarine and boarding at the Eagle's Nest Hotel. He says:

It was great. It was run by artists and gangsters. The fridge was mine. I could make anything I wanted.... The meals were there at night. I could use the shed for my motorbike.

Leo rode his motorbike to training in Geelong on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, then rode back to Melbourne. He says:

I had all the guys getting the paper to see if I was in the team. I never played for the firsts. In my own mind I knew I wasn't good enough. I was the most enthusiastic person you'd ever get. I loved to play and was a really good tap ruckman with a good leap, but if they saw me kick for goal they used to put their hands over their eyes. Get the ball to the rovers—I used to be able to do that quite well.

One night I'd been working late. Keith McTaggart came to say that I was playing against South Melbourne. Ron Clegg was still playing. Ron was a real champion of football. Dad said to me, 'Don't

take any notice of names, son. Just go out and play your game.' Dad never came and watched ... I played great all day. In the finish [Clegg] just seemed to be able to conjure up two or three goals and beat us by a couple of points. It's a great memory.

We got thirty shillings to train and play. When we played in Melbourne we'd get seven shillings and sixpence for tea money.

Leo was the players' representative on the social committee that organised Saturday night dances and was also the bag man for the footy trips (he would get the money and give it out to the players as needed). He says:

There are some wonderful people have gone through here, and that's why I always say 'The club is bigger than the individual that's here now.' Once you have finished, given up—the players, champions of the past—all gone. Don't get upset about it. The Club's bigger than anyone.

Leo played in the last practise match with the seniors in 1958. Paul Vinar fell on him and broke his left thumb. He explains:

I was building our first house. It was about 10 months before we were getting married. So I went to Tom Morrow ... and said, 'Tom, I'm going to have to give it away...' 'Oh no,' he said, 'You're just coming good...' I said, 'Hang on. You've always said to us: Never let sport interfere with your life.' 'Yes', he said. 'I suppose you're right ... Well, get your bloody house done and come back.'

### 2nd eighteen Canberra trip 1957

From left standing: John Zimmer, unknown, Norm Hocking, Russ Stephens, unknown, Brian Sharp, Mick?, Lara, Phonse Moody, Tom Morrow, Bob Troughton, Ron? West, Ted Dando, Fred Flanagan, Hub? Opperman, Russ Renfrey, Val Hotchkin, Ted Riches, Keith McTaggart, Ben del Mastro, ?, John Rook, Len Swithin, Leo McDonald, Graham O'Donnell

Seated second row: Eric Nicholls, Ray Henry, unknown, Mick Duff, Pat Whelan, Royce Mapleson, Kevin Doherty

Seated front: unknown, unknown, Ted Jones, Phonse Marshall, Fred Mervin, Bill Kavanagh, FruitFly, Max Kelly, John Benstead, Keith Lowe



Leo married Moya McGiffin on 18 October 1958. He worked for about three years doing any work he could get and carting grass hay at weekends to finish paying for his house. Then he went back and played for St Albans.

Leo and Moya have five sons. After Leo finished his house, he was asked to build a house for someone else and from then on he always worked as a builder.

Leo met Jack Morgan at Dalgety's and Jack invited him to join the Past Players. Leo did the work on all three stages of the clubroom extensions without payment. He says:

When you're brought up a Catholic, you grow up with volunteering to do things. If anything, my life has been service to the things I've been involved with. You get so much satisfaction out of it.

The clubrooms have been demolished now, but Leo explains 'Being a builder, my work is all over the place. Some of it has been pulled down. It's all part of progress. You can't look back.'

Leo has been a member of Rotary for 25 years and a member of Point Lonsdale Golf Club for 50 years. In 2006, he was made a life member of the Past Players and Officials Club in recognition of services rendered, particularly his work on the memorabilia centre. He was presented with the life membership at the preview night of the memorabilia centre opening.

### Sources

1 Leo McDonald, interviewed by Susan Kruss, 28 Nov. 2012