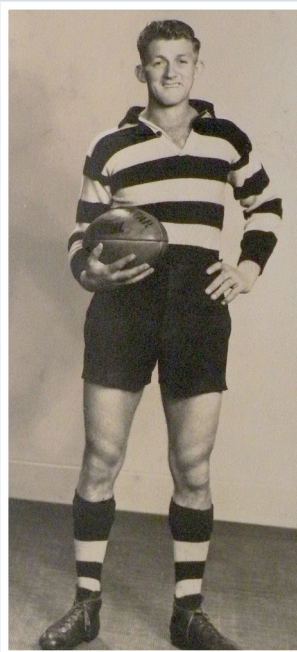




LIFE MEMBER

Russell ("Hooker") Renfrey

11 August 1923—



Russell Renfrey grew up in Drysdale. He says:

When I was a kid, in the 1930s Depression, there was no money around, so I used to cut the end off a broom and I used to kick this bloody broom and make it spin in the air.¹

Russ played his first game of competitive football in Perth during the war (see Chapter 10). He was invited to play with Carlton after the war, but says 'they kept kicking the ball over my head' so he decided to try out with Geelong in 1946 under coach Tom Quinn. Russ went straight into the GFC firsts, aged 22.

Russ played 201 senior games for Geelong 1946–56, playing in VFL finals 12 times including premiership years 1951 and 1952. He was Geelong's leading goal kicker in 1946 (equal with Norm Glenister) and kicked 165 goals in his eleven-year career.² He was the only player to play in all 26 matches of Geelong's record '26 games without a loss' in 1952–53 and never played a game in the reserves. He was reported only once, when he forgot to remove his wedding ring, but got off with a severe reprimand.

Fred Flanagan explained his style of play: 'everyone talks about Ron Barassi as the man who introduced ruck-roving but Renfrey was the original. He was playing that strong type of game on the ball years before Barassi.'³ Russ says when he was playing and George Card was the ruckman, they worked out the system of ruck roving.

Bob Davis described Russ as 'the lifeblood of the Geelong Football Club' during his eleven-year career, saying he was:

...a father figure and undoubtedly the most popular bloke at the club ... He was the sparkplug for the whole club, that's what made it run. You couldn't have a bus trip without Hooker singing Mona Lisa on the way home.⁴

When Russ retired from football in 1956 aged 33 there was a public outcry.

Russ bought his first truck in 1947, working 12-hour days to establish his business. He often came to training in a tray-truck loaded with bags of cement. He eventually owned 30 trucks and employed 26 people. His two sons joined the business which became Renfrey & Sons. Russ was inducted into the Alice Springs National Road Transport Hall of Fame in 2006.

Russ was a member of the GFC general committee in 1958, was made a life member of Geelong Football Club in 1953 and nominated in GFC's Team of the Century in 2001. He resigned from the GFC committee when he was elected to the Newtown and Chilwell Council. After football, Russ played tennis and golf, and in the early 1960s bought a yacht and for many years was a member of the Royal Geelong Yacht Club.

Russ has been a member of the Past Players and Officials Club committee since 1978. He was Vice-President 1979–80 and 1988–89, the No. 1 member

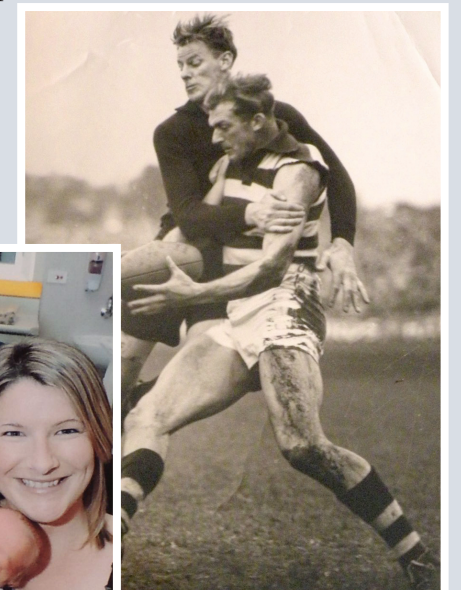
in 1987 along with Ron Hovey, and President 1990–1998. He resigned from the presidency in 1998 due to ill-health but returned to the committee in 1999. He is still a valued and actively involved member of the committee in 2013 as he approaches his 90th birthday. Russ was elected to life membership at the annual meeting on 22 February 1993 and his certificate was presented to him by Jack Morgan that year at the North Melbourne game.⁵

Russ says the 1950s premiership players are all different types and from different backgrounds, drinkers and non-drinkers, but they are really close. The close friendships came later, after football. Russ says the strong bond between them is remarked on everywhere in football circles.

Russ Renfrey has been married twice and has three children. The latest additions to his family are twin great-grandsons born on the day of the 2007 premiership.



Russ with twin great-grandsons Hamish and Ryan born on Grand Final Day 2007



Russ Renfrey 1956

Sources

- 1 Russ Renfrey, interviewed by Susan Kruss, 18 Feb. 2013
- 2 Hutchinson, C. 1984, *Cat's Tales*, Geelong Advertiser Pty Ltd, p.172
- 3 Fred Flanagan, interviewed by Susan Kruss, 21 March 2012
- 4 *Geelong Advertiser*, 2 April 2004, p.19
- 5 Minutes, 5 April 1993