



## MCC LIBRARY FACT SHEET NOVEMBER 10, 2023

### RONALD DALE BARASSI AM 1936 - 2023 STATE MEMORIAL SERVICE

#### VALE – RONALD DALE BARASSI AM 1936-2023

According to the *Encyclopedia of AFL Footballers* (Sixth Edition), Ron Barassi is: "Probably the most famous football personality in the history of the game. Barassi was fiercely determined to follow in his father's footsteps and play at senior VFL level. Barassi was not blessed with an abundance of natural talent, but more than compensated for this with extraordinary determination to succeed." From 1953 to 1964, Ron played 204 games for Melbourne, kicking 295 goals. He was a member of six Melbourne premiership teams (1955, 1956, 1957, 1959, 1960 and 1964) and the Demons' captain from 1960 to 1964. He won two Truscott trophies as Melbourne's best and fairest (1961 and 1964) and was leading goalkicker at the club in 1958 and 1959. The football world was shocked when Ron moved to Carlton in 1965 as captain-coach. He played 50 games (35 goals) for the Blues from 1965 to 1969 and coached them to a premiership in 1968 and, again, in 1970 after he has retired as a player. He retired as Carlton coach after the 1971 season but was soon placed in charge at North Melbourne, where he guided them to their first ever VFL premiership in 1975. The Kangaroos won a second premiership under his coaching in 1977. Leaving North after the 1980 season, Ron's return to Melbourne as coach in 1981 was seen as the beginning of a new era for the club, which had not reached the finals since 1964. His five years as Melbourne's coach (1981-85) were not marked by great success, however, and the Demons had to wait until 1987 to return to the finals. In 1993 Ron took on the challenge of coaching Sydney and helped turn the club's fortunes around before retiring at the end of the 1995 season. A member of the AFL Team of the Century and the Sport Australia Hall of Fame, Ron was given "Legend" status when the AFL Hall of Fame was inaugurated in 1996.

#### REMEMBERING RON BARASSI BY LYNDA CARROLL

In the middle of a run of warm spring weather, with record AFL finals crowds flocking to the MCG, Ronald Dale Barassi, aged 87, passed away on the afternoon of September 16, 2023, within hours of two of his teams tussling in a tight semi final. Surrounded by family, he was loved by so many beyond that inner circle, and we now share their sorrow and think of them at this time of sadness.

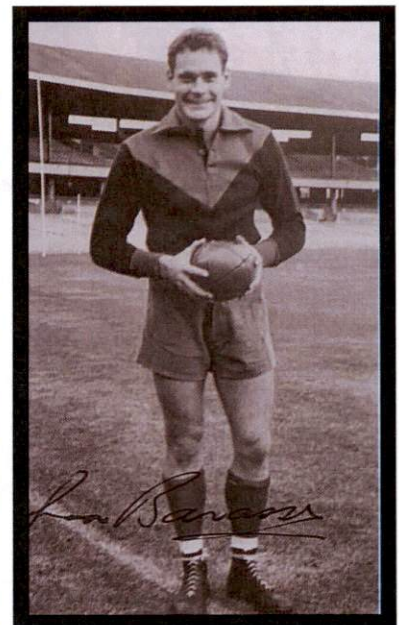
While Ron Barassi shared his brilliance, enthusiasm and energy with so many communities and individuals – and with multiple VFL/AFL clubs as he moved from Melbourne to Carlton to North Melbourne and Sydney in various permutations as both player and coach – Melbourne was where it really all began.

Ron Snr, of course, played for Melbourne – including as 19th man in the 1940 premiership side – before enlisting in WWII. Part of the 7th Division, he fought in the Middle East, and died at Tobruk on July 31, 1941. The club's Coterie pledged to care for Elza and Ron Jnr, strengthening the ties for all time. Elza was assisted with employment, while Ron returned to his grandparents in Guildford, just south of Castlemaine, before returning to the suburbs for his secondary education.

Even then, football was solidly on the agenda, with the coterie's influence playing a huge part. Ron was 15, training with Melbourne's thirds in 1951, and playing his first games in 1952. It was time for the father-son rule – linking sons of players who had played a certain number of games (then 50) to their father's club – to be implemented, ensuring that Ron Barassi would become a Demon.

The red and blue influence went even further, with coach Norm Smith – also a teammate of Ron Snr – helping out with accommodation when Elza remarried and moved to Tasmania. It was 1953, and Barassi was training with the seniors. His proximity to the coach was a mixed blessing. No special treatment was offered; in fact, Smith was harder on the youngster than on many other players. It did mean, however, that Barassi really knew he had earned every opportunity by virtue of his own determination.

Too short for ruck duties, and too big to be a rover, he showed his mettle early on by forging a new position – ruck rover. In later years, Peter McFarlane would spell it out, saying, "he had pace for a man of his size and enormous strength with which to burst packs open. He could leap for marks and was above all so thoroughly determined to succeed that no physical accident of build was going to deter him." Throughout 1953 and 1954, young Ron moved between the seconds and the seniors, until his new role clicked.



Developing an invaluable combination with Denis Cordner, Barassi had found his niche and a permanent place in the senior side. He was set to be at the heart of Melbourne's golden era.

The ultimate team man, Barassi was vice-captain to John Beckwith between 1957 and 1959, before taking the helm between 1960 and 1964. Together, this pair formed one of the game's youngest and most potent leadership combinations. Having already played in two premierships – 1955 and 1956 – another flag had been added to the list by the time the club's 1957 annual report declared that Ron Barassi was: "Perhaps the Mr Football of Melbourne, he is without a doubt one of the big names in football today."

This reputation only grew over the intervening seasons. Despite being part of a devastating loss to Collingwood in 1958, Barassi went on to play in six Melbourne premierships, stretching over a decade. The team rebounded to win the flag against Essendon in 1959, then gained redemption with victory over Collingwood in 1960. It was Barassi's first year as captain, and he was named in the side's best. The following year, he won his first Best and Fairest with Melbourne. In 1962, Barassi was made a Life Member of the Melbourne Football Club (still then the Melbourne Cricket Club Football Club), "in grateful recognition and high appreciation of ten years' honorable service." It cemented his place as one of the central figures in the club's history. In 2008, he would recall that "I'm a life member of all four clubs I have been associated with. I reckon this one means the most to me."

Barassi was still captain in 1964, when the Demons won yet another flag against Collingwood. To add to being part of Melbourne's twelfth VFL premiership, Barassi finished his time in red and blue with a second Best and Fairest award. He and "Blucy" Adams had played in six premierships each with the Demons; the most of any Melbourne players.

It was a devastating blow when Barassi headed to Carlton after the 1964 season, taking the Blues to two premierships as captain-coach between 1965 and 1971. As he explained it in later years to writer Ben Collins, he wanted to, "see if I'm a good coach in my own right. That way, if I succeed it's mine, and if I fail it's mine." The Smith influence loomed large, and it was time for Barassi to depart.

After Carlton, Barassi headed to North, where he was instrumental in delivering the Kangaroos' first two VFL premierships, in 1975 and 1977. He then returned "home" to coach the Demons between 1981 and 1985; while the ultimate success eluded him on this occasion, he was instrumental in laying the groundwork for future success. Barassi was also one of the major players in implementing the "Irish Experiment", which would bring Jim Stynes and Sean Wight to the club, and in helping to separate the football club from the Melbourne Cricket Club as part of the increasingly professional era of the game.

Once his time at Melbourne was up, there was another small spark in the Barassi coaching tank. Heading north, he took on the challenge of coaching the Sydney Swans between 1993 and 1995, helping to educate the interstate side in the ways of the game.

But Melbourne was his home, within a short drive of the MCG, not far from Melbourne's old training ground at the Junction Oval, and over the years his connections with his first VFL club remained strong. A constant in Melbourne's life – both the club and the city – he was regularly recognised and honoured. From AFL and MFC Teams of the Century, through to Halls of Fame Legend status, as a patron for bequests and fundraising, the Barassi presence shone through as a constant. But it was not only the accolades that made him special. He would willingly appear for functions, reunions, signing sessions, family days and match day photo sessions, ready to speak, grab a pen, and explain to the curious the reason behind the extra numbers on his autograph: "17410". He had played or coached in 17 grand finals, for ten premierships.

Even now, as we start the long farewell to Ron Barassi, so much part of our world, we can realise just how wonderful this is. He will always be with us, through the stories, the Septembers and the joy that the game brings. As he celebrated with enthusiasm in 2021 at the winning of Melbourne's elusive thirteenth premiership, so should we commemorate him, through every season that was, and every season to come. Vale, Ronald Dale Barassi.

## **RONALD DALE BARASSI AM IN STATISTICS**

Ronald Dale Barassi played 204 games (295 goals) for Melbourne and 50 games (35 goals) for Carlton, coaching the Blues' side for a total of 147 games for 99 wins, 47 losses and one draw, a 67.69% winning record. He then coached North Melbourne from 1973 to 1980 in 198 games for 130 wins, 65 losses and three draws, a winning percentage of 66.41. In 1964 he coached Melbourne for one game while Norm Smith was coaching the Victorian state side. He returned to coach the Demons from 1981 to 1985 in 111 games for 34 wins and 77 losses a winning percentage of 30.63. He finished his coaching career at Sydney from 1993 to 1995 in 59 games for 13 wins and 46 losses, a winning percentage of 22.03.

Ron played 115 games at the MCG for Melbourne and Carlton, of which 90 were won, 22 were lost, and three were drawn. His debut League game was at the MCG, for Melbourne against Footscray on May 16, 1953. While his last League game was at Princes Park in 1969 for Carlton's match against Melbourne, his last game at the MCG was Carlton's Round 2 match against Richmond on April 20, 1968. Ron coached 105 games at the MCG, for 41 wins, 63 losses and one draw. That drawn match was the famous 1977 grand final in which he coached North Melbourne against Collingwood. While he made his coaching debut as a stand-in coach in 1964 for Melbourne against Fitzroy at the Brunswick Street Oval, he first coached at the MCG on August 21, 1965, for Carlton's Round 17 match against Richmond. The final match he coached on the MCG was Sydney's Round 15 game against North Melbourne on July 15, 1995, and his last as a coach was Sydney's Round 22 match against Collingwood at the SCG on September 3, 1995.

## **FACT SHEETS ON THE MCC WEBSITE**

The MCC Library's match day fact sheets can be accessed through the MCC website at: <http://tinyurl.com/mcccatalogue>

**Fact sheets are prepared by MCC Library volunteers David Allen, Eric Panther, Quentin Miller, Dennis Carroll, Ian Wilkinson, and Gaye Fitzpatrick with MCC deputy librarian Trevor Ruddell.**

**Thank you also to Melbourne Football Club Historian and a member of the MCC Library's sessional staff Lynda Carroll**