

Vale Ron Middleton, President 1974-80

Ron Middleton passed away recently, this is a transcript of the tribute read at the Life Members Reunion

Ron's seven years at the helm consolidated the prior explosion of junior growth and prepared the club to become a competitive force at senior level. As a businessman who we might today call an entrepreneur, he moved the role of president from chairman to leader.

He was also a peerless raconteur, so we should start with a story told many times of how living opposite the ground made him first point of call when his son's team needed a goal umpire and he took to the role rather than anything more challenging.

That was with an Under 13 team coached by Col Morrison which would mark the start of Strathmore as a junior powerhouse, with some still sparse but high quality parental involvement alongside the likes of Hedley O'Brien and Alan Muir.

Ron was soon on the committee, not shy of work taking on roles from ground marking to serving behind the bar, forming critical friendships both in senior ranks and with a new generation of parents attracted to more active involvement as we expanded into junior age groups, none more than Jim Slevison, his long serving vice-pres.

Support from their wives, not just for their husbands' roles but often very vocally for Strathmore teams became even more important, whether helping us deal with tragedy of getting dancers up at the annual ball. Judy Middleton, her next door neighbour Mavis Coulsell, Val Slevison, Margaret Rae and Jane Leeds led the way.

As president, Ron took on being delegate to the EDFL which was one of many roles we needed to remove from future secretaries after that role became too big for volunteers to attempt to emulate Alf Pearce's way during the club's early years. Colin Rae was treasurer before and during the first years of Ron's presidency, the Rae family's broad contribution in those years too often overlooked.

Colin was succeeded by Daryl Carpenter while old player Noel Strawbridge made the secretary's job manageable. Arguably Ron's biggest coup was regaining the services of another from the early days who had gone on to be a key player at Coburg, Brian Elvery, who would captain the club between playing coaches and win a still unmatched four best and fairests.

Ron became president with Ken Pridham having started on the challenge of stabilising our position in "A" Grade, but filling the senior coaching role would continue to be an almost year to year challenge, though the success we would start to see through the '80s built on both the recruiting of well credentialed junior parents into key roles which accelerated under Ron's leadership and our efforts to retain and transition junior players.

We never lacked reminders of Ron and Judy's affection for their holiday house in Shoreham, but that never intruded on Ron's time with footy. He also enjoyed a reputation for liking a flutter and

had a reputation for being lucky which might have more reflected his willingness to put his hand in his pocket. The Cricket Club was a year old when Ron became Football Club president and he attended a memorable Cup Eve at The International, buying three late tickets of many hundreds in the cup sweep, then drawing three horses.

Ron had intended to step down a year earlier, but his personal popularity helped ensure that he would continue and set a record it took John Elliott until this year to break and ensure that we had a better succession plan than first envisaged, one that provided Bob Leathers, Peter Owen and a first "A" Grade flag. The club by then demanded a huge volunteer effort and it would be impossible to try to individualise many who responded so well to Ron's leadership and friendship.