

## Ron Barassi AM

Ronald Dale Barassi is a legend for many reasons; incredible player, revolutionary coach, enduring media personality. For more than 50 years he has been one of the most influential people in the game, and few can match the shadow he casts. As a player and coach, he took part in 17 grand final appearances for 10 premierships. In a playing career spanning from 1953 to 1969 Barassi played 254 games, and kicked 330 goals. Barassi coached over 500 games.

Melbourne had gone to great lengths to recruit the young Barassi, and coach Norm Smith - who had played with his father - took him under his wing after his mother moved to Tasmania. Smith offered the 16 year-old use of his backyard bungalow, and looking back on the experience, Barassi believes that sharing Sunday roasts with one of football's greatest brains was invaluable to his development.

Melbourne was a dominant force in the 1950s, and Barassi developed quickly into a talented footballer and fierce competitor. Making his senior debut at the age of 17 he soon became known for his strength and natural ability as a player and was revered as one of the most feared enforcers in the VFL. His efforts at ruck-rover paved the way for a new-style of quicker on-ball play. Barassi had eyes only for the ball, and used his tremendous strength to break through packs and create scoring opportunities.

Barassi soon proved himself as an influential footballer, and was quickly handed leadership responsibilities. In 1957 he was appointed vice-captain, and captain three years later until he left the club in 1964. In a period of unparalleled success, Barassi helped Melbourne win six premierships (1955, 1956, 1957, 1959, 1960, 1964 - awarded best on ground in 1956 and 1957) - the last two as captain, won the team's best-and-fairest award in 1961 and 1964, and was the team's leading goal kicker in 1958 (equal) and 1959.

Keen to test his skills as coach in a fresh environment, Barassi also knew that the new wage - unthinkable high in a time where amateurs were still common - could help with his children's education. He subsequently joined Carlton in 1965, a decision which shocked the football world. While it might seem commonplace today, high-profile players leaving clubs for financial security was virtually unheard of at that time.

In 1968, he guided Carlton to its first premiership in 21 years against Essendon, and in 1970, in front of the biggest ever VFL crowd, he conjured footy's most famous comeback, as arch rivals Collingwood were run down after leading by 44 points at half-time.

After the 1971 season, having played 50 games (35 goals) and coached 147 games for the Blues, Barassi left to focus on his business career. But before Barassi's playing days were over, he represented Victoria 19 times and was captain coach of the touring team to Ireland in 1967 and 1968. It was during the years 1956, 1958 and 1961 (captain) that he was also part of three Carnival Teams; years in which he was named All Australian.

## AFL



Not long after leaving the Blues, he was lured by the prospect of coaching another struggling team in blue and white, North Melbourne. Taking over for the 1973 season, Barassi found North in much the same situation as Carlton had been eight years before. With a clear eye on success, administrators Allen Aylett and Ron Joseph had armed the Kangaroos with a new batch of stars.

Proven champions from clubs throughout the country, including Malcolm Blight, Wayne Schimmelbusch, Barry Cable, John Rantall, Barry Davis and Doug Wade were soon lured to Arden Street. However, it required a coach of Barassi's quality to pull all the elements together into a winning formula.

Barassi didn't disappoint, bringing a combination of tactical brilliance and ultra-disciplined coaching to the flagless Roos. Taking over the wooden spoon winners of 1972, he raised the team to sixth position the following year and led North to their first VFL premiership just two years later in 1975. North was runner up in 1976 and 1978.

The Kangaroos went on to win another premiership in 1977, but it very nearly wasn't, as North Melbourne gave up a late lead against Collingwood in the second ever drawn VFL grand final. Within a week, Barassi had picked his side up from this disappointment to lead North to a memorable triumph. North Melbourne is the only club to have played in five successive finals.

For Barassi, his premiership victories at North rank with the epic 1970 grand final with Carlton against Collingwood as his finest coaching moments.

Barassi was inducted into the AFL Hall of Fame in 1996 as a Legend, after becoming a Life Member of the AFL in 1979 for his outstanding contribution to football as a player and as a coach. He is a Legend and life member of the Carlton, Melbourne, Kangaroos, and the Sydney Swans football clubs.

Barassi was honoured as the 2006 Legend of Australian Sport.



[www.thekfaktor.com](http://www.thekfaktor.com)