

CELEBRATING 60 YEARS

PLAYERS AND SUPPORTERS ARE INVITED TO ATTEND A NIGHT OF HISTORY AS GEELONG RANGERS PRESENTS A CELEBRATION DINNER AT THE CAPRI FUNCTION CENTRE IN NORTH GEELONG ON JUNE 20. TICKETS AVAILABLE FROM STUART BEGG ON 0400133610



IN 1955 teenagers around the world were ripping up cinema seats and dancing in the aisles as Bill Haley rocked around the clock. In the North Geelong Fire Station six men, one woman and a teenage boy were holding a meeting that would shape the face of Geelong soccer for decades to come.

IF YOU KNOW YOUR HISTORY



They were people with a passion for the game and had the know how to do something about it. They established a club that has grown from the foundations they created. The late Bill Dorris Snr attended that first meeting and the teenager was John Barr, two Scots who would go on to create a soccer dynasty that started out as Geelong Scottish. Bob Barclay was the first president, Dorris was the original secretary and they immediately launched into a fund-raising frenzy.

Times were tough but so were the men, fit and determined, they had come to Australia to carve out a new life. They needed to socialise with their own and there was no better way to do it than through soccer. By harassing the council they were given a ground to play on at Calvert Street, Hamlyn Heights.

It was no more than a paddock and trees had to be removed and the pitch had to be levelled and stones dug out. Dorris said they recruited players but it did not matter how good they were, if they didn't pitch in they could find another club.

They marked the ground with sawdust, registered themselves as a club and the following year they joined the Geelong and District League with about 20 players. "We were always arguing, but we got the jobs done, and I would have walked over broken glass for some of them," Dorris said.

Barr and Billy Muir played in the early years and both went on to become stalwarts of the club. By 1959 the club was more than competitive and the Geelong British side approached the club about amalgamation. "I told them we didn't need to amalgamate but if they wanted to join us they could. They did," Dorris said. Success followed and the club won the local league four seasons in a row and expanded to two teams, Geelong Scottish and Hamlyn Rangers.

The club was on its way. It had change rooms, which it shared with Bell Park Football Club, it had money in the bank. Membership was set at two shillings a far cry from what it now costs to put a player on the park. Dorris, who has written a book outlining the rise of Rangers, helped the club grow and prosper and along the way pick up a swag of championships. He was president between 1957-64, had a stint as secretary and coached for six years.

Along the way Rangers won a host of league titles and had more cups than a cafeteria. The Sitar Cup, the Fred Lang Shield, the Ted Jones Cup, the Begonia Cup, they all made their way into the Rangers trophy cabinet. Rangers outgrew Calvert Street and moved to its current headquarters at Myers Reserve in 1975. During that time John Barr took over the presidency and was at the helm from 1968 -81. The Rangers had just won the Country Cup but were not promoted. Corio was promoted even though it finished fifth.

That tore the heart out of the club for a while and Barr was forced to knock on doors to bring back disgruntled members. It irked members then and still does. The move to Myers Reserve was expected to revitalise the club, but Barr admits that many supporters thought the hard work had been done and stepped away. "But in reality we had to take the next step and it was hard to build up the momentum again," Barr said.

In 1983 the club went through its most ambitious period and raised funds to bring top players from Melbourne. Former Soccerroo Johnny Gardiner joined Rangers, as did former Scottish international Frank Munro. The club won the league in 1983 and 1984 and played in the Victorian second division. But Barr believes that spending heavily to achieve championships was the wrong way to go. "The success was great but when the money ran out so did the players we brought in."

Barr downplayed his contribution, but in reality he was the rock that the club rebuilt on. His loyalty was forged in the early days when he saw the players battling prejudice every week. "There were Greeks, Italians, Dutch, Germans every nationality and while they hated each other they hated us even more and there were some wild games, but they were character building for Rangers." "We went through difficult times, but we got through them and we are still there today."



Local legend Troy Hardy after scoring a hat-trick in his last senior game for the club he loves.

"I think the people that are running Rangers today are the best that we have ever had, they are bringing more people into the game, they are encouraging more women and refugees to come along and they are promoting soccer, Barr said."

Rangers went on to claim local bragging rights by winning the Geelong Advertiser cup in 1987. The club decided to cease big payment of players and subsequently lost many of its top footballers and were relegated in 1987. The slide continued for several years, and Rangers decided to concentrate on producing juniors that would play for the shirt. It was a long-term project and unusual for soccer where instant success is demanded.



The club rebuilt and is reaping the benefits of a junior policy with a system that takes the young players from an early age right through to the seniors. Rangers now have some of the best junior coaches in Geelong and the players have a career path to follow.

Rangers dared where others dare not follow. The club juniors are now competitive at every age level and Rangers are going from strength to strength. There's no cheque book soccer here.

You play for the lion on the shirt, you play for your team-mates and the honour of continuing the tradition.

The club has radically improved its facilities at Myers Reserve with two new floodlit training grounds,

with drought proof grass. More than \$500,000 was spent on upgrading the changerooms and the club can then quite rightly claim it has one of the best facilities in the region. It's a long way from Calvert Street.

In recent years the club has been inundated with requests to play junior soccer at Rangers, that comes through the historic attraction of the club, its dedicated coaches and of course the rapid rise of the game.

Over the past three years the growing number of soccer players in Australia has led to claims the game can soon become the biggest sport in the country. At Rangers we did not need to look at those statistics, we are witnessing it first-hand. New analysis by sports research group Gemba says that 1.96 million are now playing soccer, up from 1.7 million in 2009-10, an increase of around 15 per cent in the past three years. Rangers' numbers have doubled that percentage, we are packed to capacity.

The club now has more than 250 players and aims to expand further.

As the original logo said 60 years ago we are "READY"