



Southern Football Netball League

Hall of Fame



IAN 'RABBIT' BIRKETT

EASTERN SUBURBS CHURCHES FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

- Played over 400 games with Burwood United FC/Mt Waverley-Burwood
- Eastern Suburbs Churches Football Association Under 17's League Best & Fairest 1977
- Eastern Suburbs Churches Football Association A-Grade Best & Fairest x 4 1985, 1987-88, 1990
- Eastern Suburbs Churches Football Association Leading Goal Kicker x 2 1985 (84 goals), 1987 (70 goals)
- Southern Football Netball League, League Best & Fairest Runner-Up 1997

A more humble champion than Ian Birkett you will not find.

Affectionately known to most as Rabbit, Birkett was an out and out superstar of the ESCFA, the dominant player of his era. But you will never hear him say as much. In fact, he will likely be slightly embarrassed reading this article, such is his modesty.

However, there is no denying his standing as one of the all-time greats of the ESCFA.

His well-known nickname was given to him by his first coach at Burwood United, who coincidentally was fellow 2015 SFNL Hall of Fame inductee Jim Honey. Birkett, aged just 11 at the time, was playing in the Under 15s with his older brother when Honey likened him to a rabbit because of his smaller body, his zip and his willingness to burrow in for the footy. It has stuck with him ever since.

From those humble beginnings Birkett went on to win the ESCFA Under 17s league Best and Fairest and soon developed into a supremely versatile senior footballer with a penchant for the spectacular. He played his best footy as a blisteringly quick onballer, but was equally dangerous up forward and was a renowned goalkicker. With strong hands, lovely foot skills and ability to play multiple positions, Rabbit was the complete package.

“He was pretty much known as the superstar of the ESCFA in the A-Grade sides,” Honey recalled.

“He was a magnificent mark of the ball and he could take screamers over packs and things like that and did so on a regular basis throughout his career.”

Birkett proved remarkably durable over his career too, playing over 400 games with both Burwood United and the now-defunct SFNL club Mt Waverley-Burwood. In his prime he won four ESCFA A-Grade Best and Fairest awards between 1985 and 1990 and was also crowned the ESCFA’s leading goalkicker in 1985 (84 goals) and 1987 (70).

But Birkett said that his career highlights were undoubtedly the two flags he played in with Burwood United. He won his first premierships medallion in 1983, before taking a hiatus from footy the following year to go travelling overseas with a mate. He returned to the club in 1985 and was a dual premierships player by season’s end.

“That’s what you play for, you know,” Birkett said.

“I was lucky enough as a junior we were in a lot of finals. We were pretty strong back then, Burwood... but to win the senior (flag) obviously that’s the ultimate.”

Birkett may be loath to speak about his glittering career, but those that witnessed him will agree that he was one of the greatest ESCFA players of his time.

By Will Hunter