



## *Alan Flint*

Clayton Football Club Player 1958-1969 (200+ Games)

Clayton Football Club Member 1958-2018

Clayton Football Club Committee Member 1959- 1969

Clayton Football Club Secretary (playing) 1960-61

Clayton Football Club Life Member 1967

Clayton Football Club Reserve Captain 1969

Eastern Suburban Churches Football Association Umpire 1970-1984 (300+ games)

Eastern Suburban Churches Football Association A & B Grade grand Final Umpire 1977

Eastern Suburban Churches Football Association Executive Committee Member 1972-1983

Eastern Suburban Churches Umpires Association Keith Huggins Award x2 1977 & 1982

Eastern Suburban Churches Umpires Association Life Member 1979

Southern Football League Umpires Association Life Member 1996

Clayton Football Club Hall of Fame Member 2013

Alan Flint's football journey was an unlikely one from the outset.

As a youngster, his foot was caught in the wheel of a bicycle on which he was a passenger. His father didn't realise and kept pedalling.

Initially, there was a fear Flint would lose his severely injured foot. Thankfully that proved unnecessary, but recovery was a slow process and he didn't attend school for a year.

Flint faced other challenges early in life, losing his mother at the age of 15 and scarcely seeing his dad, who had to work nightshift to support the family.

Along with some mates, Flint found his way to the Brighton 4ths, the under 18 side of the Brighton VFA club conveniently based in his street. His coach there, ex Hawthorn star and then Brighton senior player Neil Pearson became a critical influence.

"Neil took me firmly under his wing and taught me his skills and how to fight hard in my life and on the football field as a smaller player," Flint reflects.

After a couple of seasons at Brighton, Flint's family moved home and he found his way to Ringwood footy club, playing in the Croydon-Ferntree Gully Football League. Here he was coached by another ex-VFL player, Ken Albiston, who had enjoyed a successful career with Richmond and Melbourne as a rover and small forward.

However, after a year representing Ringwood another family relocation, this time to North Clayton, put Flint on the path to the club that would become an ongoing part of his life.

Working for the Commonwealth Bank, Flint transferred to the Clayton branch. As chance would have it, Allan Hall, president of Clayton Football Club was painting the outside of that branch.

Flint wandered outside on a break and Hall, establishing he had found a young footballer, wasted no time in encouraging Flint to pull on a Clayton jumper. Thus began his 205-game stint as a Clayton player.

However, from early in the piece Flint's involvement at Clayton extended beyond his onfield role.

"As a young chap when I started at Clayton, the club was struggling on and off the field. I soon recognised that this club needed good and faithful people to keep it alive. Although playing was my first love, I joined the committee and was soon recognised for my energy," he recalls.

That recognition of Flint's passion and enthusiasm resulted in him being encouraged to take on the position of club secretary.

"A secretary's tasks are many and varied. I found my new role to be challenging to say the least. I soon learned that I was involved deep within a 'people business'," Flint reflects.

As secretary he worked closely with club legend Jack Meade after whom Clayton's football oval is now named. The two of them teamed up to recruit players and raise vital funds for the club.

This was no easy task during "the most unsuccessful era in the club's history", Flint says.

As well as his duties as secretary, he acted as Clayton's club delegate to the Federal Football League (FFL). He filled these dual positions in 1960-61, but found the responsibilities negatively impacted on his onfield performance.

Thus, Flint elected to focus his energy on playing, although he remained on the club's general committee until 1969.



He recalls the most amusing incident that occurred during his time as secretary. The Oakleigh Council advised him it wanted to paint Clayton's goal and behind posts. He was asked where the posts were.

"At the ground", was his unsurprising response.

"No they're not, you had better find them", replied the council representative.

The posts were found in a neighbour's backyard, neatly chopped for firewood. Fortunately the club received a new set.

As a player, Flint's speed and his accurate stab passes were his greatest assets.

He played for Clayton from 1958 until 1969.

Although he could have played longer and initially hoped to reach the 250-game milestone, opposition players were getting bigger and the diminutive Flint was getting sorer.

His neighbour happened to be the umpire appointment officer of the Eastern Suburban Churches Football Association (ESCFA).

"He used to see me limping down the street on a Sunday morning and he'd say give it away, come and umpire," Flint says.

Eventually the aches and pains persuaded him to take the advice on board and he is very grateful he did.

"I had to look for another avenue to stay in the game and I found it," he says of umpiring.

At the time, Flint was also pursuing an athletics career and umpiring in the mud strengthened his legs and improved his running.

But he loved umpiring so much he ended up officiating in over 300 ESCFA games and he served as a member of the umpires executive committee for 11 years.

A memorable achievement during his career with the whistle came in 1977 when Flint officiated at both the A and B grade grand finals, held on successive weekends.

That was a feat made possible by a draw in an A grade semi final, which pushed the decider back a week.

For the record, Donvale United pipped Burwood United by two points in a thrilling A grade grand final.

As an umpire, Flint placed great importance on building rapport with players. He also believed umpires needed to look the part to convey an air of professionalism and commitment.

That was why he procured 'red and white' umpire jackets and red carry bags for the umpire panel, sourced through VFA legend Fred Cook who was then working at Puma.

The jackets were worn in the rooms and for umpire warm ups, but it wasn't just an umpire's clothes that were important in forming the required impression.

"We (umpires) were trained to the point where you don't just straggle out onto the ground in a final. You march out there in step and be part of what the public is going to see as a professional team going out onto that ground," Flint explains.



But don't believe the serious approach Flint took to his umpiring prevented him from enjoying moments of humour on the field.

He is particularly fond of an occasion when he decided to recall a player to the oval after that individual had served his penance for an indiscretion. By then, the player was clad in a leather jacket with an arm around a girl and with a dog on leash in his other hand.

Flint enthusiastically recalls what then transpired.

"I call him on and of course the jacket went, the dog went, I forget about the girl now, and he's run on and I said to the boundary umpire 'righto boundary, let's have it.' And he (returning player) takes it (the footy) out of the ruck and he dobs a goal from that behind post. And we were running back to the centre together and I said, 'isn't that better than cuddling a girl in the drizzly rain out there?' and he said, 'bloody oath it is mate'."

Having relocated in the early 1980s, it became too difficult for Flint to continue as an ESCFA umpire and he hung up his whistle in 1984.

It was a short lived retirement, with Flint officiating in the Diamond Valley League the following season in a successful attempt to encourage his son to umpire.

However, it was Flint's love of Clayton Football Club that brought him back into the SFNL fold in 2007.

He began supporting the club financially and he was heavily involved in Clayton's centenary celebrations the following year.

Due to Flint's connection with the Universal Coin Company, Clayton's centenary celebrations included unique elements such as tossing a Roman coin to start the centenary match. The coin was later raffled to raise funds for the club.

Flint also organised commemorative centenary wine bottles for the club to sell.

Clayton lost the centenary match to St Kilda City, but Flint indicates this did not diminish the celebration of such an important milestone for the club he adores.

His love for Clayton remains undiminished and he continues to attend games and raise funds for the club, and support its footy and netball teams.

Flint's contributions in so many areas have previously been recognised.

He is a life member of both the Eastern Suburban Churches Football Umpires Association and the Southern Football League Umpires Association. Flint is also a member of the Clayton Football Club Hall of Fame and a life member of the club.

He is justifiably proud to add induction into the SFNL Hall of Fame to his list of football related honours, explaining its significance.

"As a retired umpire in the ESCFA there was no thought of in 2018 having a chance to be inducted into the Hall of Fame. I'm just floating, I'm absolutely floating."

For his contributions to the SFNL and its forerunner leagues and to the Clayton Football Netball Club, Flint is richly deserving of his induction into the SFNL Hall of Fame.

***By Andrew Paloczi***

