

Neil Church & Brothers

The Church name is one of the many great families that shaped not only the Club but the Mitcham community itself.

Neil was one of four brothers all playing for Mitcham: Howard, Neil, Ken and Ray. However, the four Church brothers played in only the one game all together, but this remains a Club record. Younger brother Ken was selected in Mitcham's Team of the Century - half back flank.

Neil lived and worked in Mitcham, happily in the Barelli Bakery (another famous MFC family). Neil's son Peter also played for Mitcham, finishing his football career at 62 with the AFL Masters (over 35s) in NSW.



Cira 1952: Neil (on the left), home deliveries in the horse and cart.

Neil is Mitcham Football Club's oldest living 'Life Member' and is proudly the Club's Number One Ticket Holder. Neil and his wife Lorna are 94. Both were born in 1927. Lawn bowls remains Neil's game of choice, with the greens a handy 40 steps from his front door. Remarkably, Neil remains a very well-preserved man, with few wrinkles and a better crop of hair than the late Bob Hawke. Add to this a good memory and an agile mind. Best of all Neil is a very humble, non-judgmental person, who is great company to be in.

For the vast majority of Neil's playing days, his club change rooms were the old wooden Grandstand built in 1910 and burnt down in 1955. So, when he saw the new 2020 Club facilities he was 'blown away' by how good and thoughtful these modern facilities now are. No females played football in his day, however, they certainly do today with all new facilities designed to be more female-friendly to meet the needs of the growing number of girls that now play footy.



Neil Church (left) with MFC President Matt McCubbin (right).



Walker Park's original wooden Grandstand, photo circa 1938. Built in 1910.

Neil's MFC Honor Roll

- In 1943 at 16, Neil played in Mitcham's U20's Grand Final V Nth Kew, in the Melbourne Boys League. The match was the curtain-raiser to the VFL Grand Final, Richmond V Essendon. Before a crowd of 42,100.
- Neil played 254 Senior games in the 1940's and 50's, playing across the half back line.
- Neil was a 2-time Premiership player: 1947 V Box Hill and 1952 V East Hawthorn.
- Neil was an Eastern Suburban Football League Representative player on 2 occasions.
- In 1957 Neil was awarded MFC Life Member. The same year the brick Grandstand was built for 17,203 pounds.

Mitcham Football Club - Premiers 1947



Back Row - P.Quinlan, L. Meridith, J. Williams(Pres), J. Cooke, D. Tucker, D. Barelli, F. Clark, M. Scrivan, D. Dempster, A. Barelli
Centre Row - J. Crisp, G. Matlock, B. Neenan(coach), F. Kohlman, N. Church, K.Stafford
Front Row - G. Dempster, H. Church, R. Brown, H. McNiff, D. Forbes

Defeated Box Hill 15.14. 104 to 15.13. 103



The 1947 Grand Final Teams line up before the game (played at Box Hill).



Mitcham Football Club Senior XVIII – Premiers 1952

Back Row: R. Turner, T. Wishart, K. Stafford, R. Mann, R. Ireland, H. Sawatzky, M. Scriven, H. McNiff, D. Barelli,
 F. Peel, K. Church, A. Barelli, N. Church, A. McClelland.
 Middle Row: K. Nicholson, H. Coombs, K. Herbert (Capt./Coach), G. Matlock, W. Sewart.
 Bottom Row: R. Macauley, L. Waugh (mascot), R. Brown, W. Marsh (trainer).



Neil (left) with MFC Historian - Garry Wathen (right).

Families over the journey make football Clubs.

We salute Neil and the Church family for their significant contribution to Mitcham Football Club. Loyal and devoted to the Tigers forever.

Author: Garry Wathen, MFC Historian. April 2021.

Footnote:

To see a video of a 1953 Grand Final played at Walker Park, (between Deepdene V Tooronga), see the reference link below. This video provides a good illustration of how football was played in Neil's era. Including the long extinct drop kick.

<https://www.facebook.com/TheLocalFootyShow/videos/715180049336335/>