

CHAPTER 1

BARASSI AS A BLUE



31 Ron Barassi

Ron Barassi as a player at Carlton

Honours: captain-coach 1965-68; 2nd best and fairest 1967; 3rd best and fairest 1966; 5th best and fairest 1965; Carlton's leader in possessions for 1967 (469)

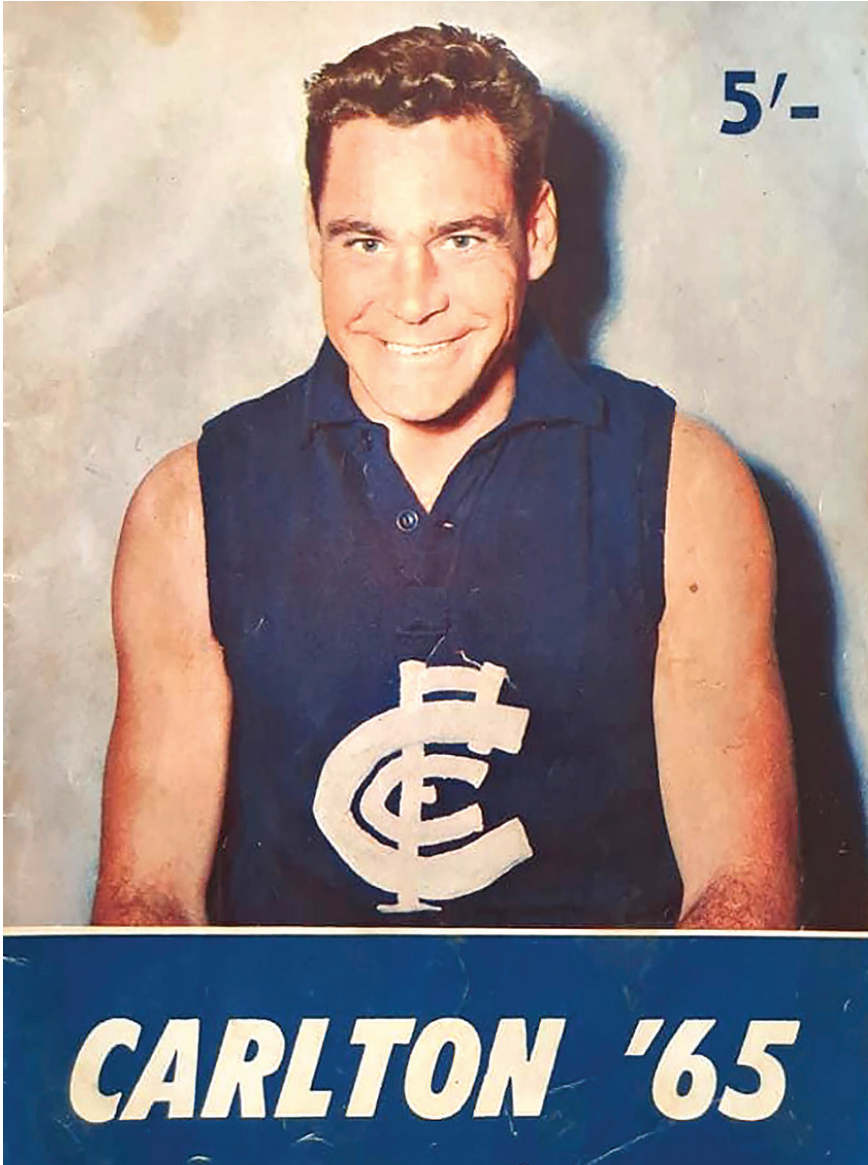
1968 stats: 10 games, 3 goals, 165 disposals (average 16.5), 32 marks

Debut: 1953 (1965 at Carlton)

Career games to the end of 1968: 253 (49 at Carlton)

Ron Barassi as a coach at Carlton

Honours: premiership coach in 1968 and 1970.



1965

- Barassi's first year as Carlton's captain-coach
- Carlton improves from five wins in 1964 to 10 wins in 1965
- Carlton finish 6th in 1965

Barassi's first match as a Blue



1965 – Round 1 versus Hawthorn — Glenferrie Oval.

This photo was taken during Barassi's first match as a Blue in April of 1965. The Age's report stated, "Carlton's venture in signing Ron Barassi

as playing-coach paid its first rich dividend at Hawthorn. The Blues now know with reasonable certainty that the move is going to prove a profitable investment for the club." Profitable indeed! His leadership transformed a mediocre club into a powerhouse club.

Although this photo had been used on the cover of Football Records in the late 1960s, it has rarely been seen since in other publications.

Barassi & the match committee



1965 — Barassi and the match committee

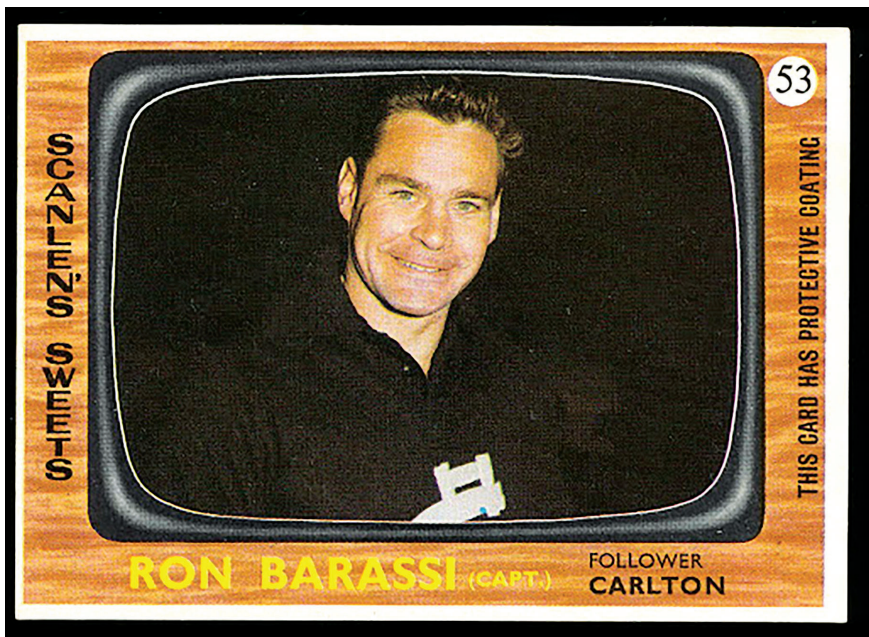
Carlton's match committee gathered together in 1965. From left to right, there were Kevin McEnroe, Jack Wrouth, Rod McLean and Ron Barassi. The old Carlton stalwarts, McLean and Wrouth, were highly respected premierships players for the Blues. McLean was a 1938 and 1945 Carlton premiership player and Jack Wrouth represented the Blues in the 1938 premiership team.

In 1968, Jack Wrouth was the Chairman of Selectors and was integral in the decision making that led to the premiership win. Wrouth is best remembered for kicking four goals in the 1938 Grand Final against

Collingwood and being one of the club's best in that drought breaking premiership. Thirty years later, in 1968, he had a key role in Carlton breaking another premiership drought, but this time from a tactical and team selection viewpoint. This photo is one of the few that remains of Wrouth from the 1960s. For further insight, refer to the chapter *Carlton's Champions* for comments from Neil Chandler on the impact of Jack Wrouth at the club.

1967

- Barassi placed 2nd in Carlton's best and fairest
- Carlton was on top of the ladder for 16 weeks in an 18 week season
- Barassi saw his first year of finals action as Carlton's captain-coach



Two legends



1967 — Round 12 versus Fitzroy at Princes Park.

This is one of only a handful of photographs that are still available of the two AFL Hall of Fame Legends, Ron Barassi and Alex Jesaulenko, on the field at the same time.

It is by no means a spectacular photograph, but at least it features these two giants of the game together on the field.

Barassi had a strong role in this match, as he obtained 16 possessions and three hit-outs whilst Jesaulenko was deemed best on ground and obtained the three Brownlow votes for his contribution.

Barassi's black eye



1967 — Round 16 versus St Kilda, Princes Park

The Age's caption stated, "An exhausted Ron Barassi walks off in the rain surrounded by fans." On closer examination of the photo, Barassi was sporting a black eye as he walked up the race. Barassi was deemed the best player on the ground by many newspaper pundits for this match against St Kilda, yet the umpires didn't agree as they gave him just the two Brownlow votes as 2nd best on ground. In the remaining footage

from this match, some of his great moments are preserved including an impressive long shot at goal after he out-marked St Kilda's Brian Sierakowski.

This photo featured on the cover of the VFL Football Record in 1968, but it was cropped to only include Barassi walking up the race, and they cut out the crowd scene behind the fence. However, the photo is far more effective with the inclusion of the crowd, as the connection with the supporters is an important element. After standing in the rain for hours, the supporters stayed behind in the dark and cold conditions to see their heroes off the ground and are therefore an integral part of the story. One can also sense how cold it was at the time due to the rain droplets that distorted the camera's shot and looked like snowflakes above Barassi's head.

Barassi's mark at Princes Park

In the archives on Ron Barassi as a Carlton player there are few photos that feature him marking the ball. It is a pity, as Barassi was an excellent mark and was only one mark behind Jesaulenko (78 marks to Jesaulenko, 77 to Barassi) for the 1967 season. This photo of Barassi in the match against St Kilda from August of 1967 has remained unpublished and unloved for over 50 years.

Barassi had his best year as a Carlton player in '67. He was runner-up for the Best and Fairest, and was voted the equal 4th best player in the league in the Sporting Globe poll. He was also viewed as the 7th best player by the Footy Week panel. It was not a bad record for a player in his 15th year of league football.



1967 — Round 16 versus St Kilda, Princes Park

The finals leader

The Footy Week newspaper published this promotional picture referring to Barassi as “Mr Football” after Carlton’s match against Geelong in the preliminary final of 1967. Barassi was yet again a dominant finals player during this match, and even though it was his last final as a player he topped the Carlton team in terms of possessions with 26 hard earned touches to his name.

The great Norm Smith said in a newspaper report, “In the final stages he (Barassi) could only kick the ball about 45 yards. He had willed his body beyond ordinary physical endurance but he refused to quit. I have always



He's "Mr Football"

● **LEFT** he shows his perfect build as he looks for a lead further afield in this fine action picture.

Barassi - the perfect physical specimen for our great Australian game

1967-Preliminary Final — MCG

had a great regard for Ron's character, his will to win and his determination. But it has never been higher than it was that day at the MCG."

1968

- **Premiership success**

The amount of photographs that remain of Ron Barassi in action as a Carlton player is not a significant amount. Less than 20 photos of him have been utilised in books and the majority of those books consistently use the same photos of him. The most utilised photo is probably the one of him tackling a Footscray opponent from Round 5, 1968 (also utilised in this book). So, any photograph of Barassi outside that range is important.

Determination



1968 — Round 2 versus Richmond—MCG

During this Round 2, 1968 match, the Tigers handed out a proper hiding to the Blues. One can obtain an insight from this photo as to why Carlton lost this match. Just look at the number of Richmond players around the

ball. There were five Richmond players in the immediate vicinity of the ball to Carlton's three players. Barassi was the Carlton player attempting to punch the ball.

One of the positive elements to this photograph is how it encapsulated Barassi's character. With nearly every action shot of Barassi there is some visual reference to his determination. He's either gritting his teeth, grimacing or somehow conveying intense determination. This photo is no exception.

Stress during the finals



1968 — Finals versus Essendon

Ron Barassi, the coach. His poor old clipboard appeared to be bearing the brunt of his strong grip and heightened emotions. Barassi experienced significant moments of stress during the Grand Final of 1968.

In the final moments of the last quarter, with the difference less than a goal, it was just as likely that Carlton was going to lose the match as win it. A close grand final will put a man who has sacrificed four years of hard work for the ultimate prize through a whirlwind of emotions.

The premierships winning coach at Carlton



Ron Barassi, the premierships winning coach at Carlton.

All the stresses, obstacles and the demoralising finals losses in 1967 to Richmond and Geelong were made irrelevant when the Blues won the 1968 premiership. Barassi could not have looked more pleased than he did at this moment.



Caricature drawings of the great Ronald Dale Barassi were commonplace. This newspaper caricature was printed soon after the premiership win with the writing on the cake stating, “21 years trying — VFL premiers. Happy Coming-of-Age” as Ron blew out the candles in the form of Essendon players.

The end of the Barassi era

All good things come to an end and for Ron Barassi at Carlton the end came in 1971. This letter (facing page) was an invitational letter for Barassi's testimonial dinner in 1971. It was the last formal acknowledgement of the man, Ron Barassi, who revolutionised the Carlton Football Club. In 1965, he started his tenure as a coach at a mediocre club and on his departure in 1971 he left behind a powerhouse club ready for further glories. Carlton won two vital premierships in his reign.

Notice that to the very end that Barassi did the team thing and wasn't seeking to make money out of the event. “Ron has quite definitely told the club that he wants no (financial) part of any Testimonial Dinner. He believes he has been well rewarded,” it said in the letter. One peculiar

aspect to the letter was that the club had not yet updated their letterhead to include the 1970 premiership in the list of Carlton's premiership teams even though over a year had passed since the victory.

