

Keith “Bluey” Truscott – Legend of the VAFA

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Legends of the game are not born in the spotlights of the Australian Football League, they are not created by careful draft picks and training, they are not spun from media speculation and praise – legends are made from almost superhuman efforts, repeatedly nailing bags of goals, taking lofty marks or battling through injury to achieve something truly extraordinary. A player is only as good as what he leaves behind him. This is the importance of the amateurs in football, a starting point for greats of the game, where rumours and ‘big wraps’ circle the potential champions of tomorrow.

One such great was the admired and idolised Keith “Bluey” Truscott, one of Melbourne Football Club’s heroic sons before the war which took his life. The story of Truscott remembered today is of his inspiring character and the tragic nature of his death, but the Melbourne High School Old Boys’ Football Club of the Victorian Amateur Football Association proudly recall him as one of their greatest players.

The nature of the VAFA today sees it described as “grass roots football”, members of a community coming together once a week to do battle on the football ground. Before the days of the National Draft, the amateurs was where stars began their careers, some moving on and some choosing to remain. Throughout its history, the MHSOB Football Club has boasted household names among its players such as their 1951 Junior Best and Fairest, future Brownlow Medallist Neil Roberts, and some not-so-renowned for their playing ability – members of *The Seekers*, Athol Guy and Bruce Woodley.

Since its formation in 1929, the club has enjoyed such successes as the 1946 B Grade Premiership as well as disappointments such as the decline of the club in the 1980s. The club still

participates strongly in the VFA competition bearing the maroon unicorn proudly on their guernseys.

It was at the club in 1934 that Keith Truscott, at 17 years of age, impressed in the centre, earning a reputation as an energetic player with fine skills, in today's terms, an "excitement machine". He caught spectators' and players' attention alike by kicking ten goals in several games that year and earning selection in the interstate team to play against South Australia. It was the beginning of a short yet successful career, a path followed by many from a relatively unknown football club to fame and the glory of playing for the 'big league', from amateur to professional.

Truscott went on to join the Melbourne Football Club and become one of its heroes. He was declared 'best afield' in the 1939 Premiership and also played at half forward in the 1940 win. His skills included 'speed, bulk and strength', scoring many possessions and contributing to Melbourne's successful years. His fame was not only contained to the football community.

Squadron Leader Truscott's actions as a fighter pilot in the Second World War inspired many in Australia and made him the man "brave as few were, loved as few were," fighting in the Battle of Britain and the Battle of Milne Bay with a 'Red Demon' as his mascot. His exploits, including shooting down thirteen German planes and having to abandon his plane in the English Channel, were known throughout the country.

He is recalled by his team mates as "a bit of a daredevil" and remembered for his role in the closely-bound Melbourne team of the era, pouring cold water over his friends to clear the changing rooms and celebrating a win over Collingwood by removing pickets from fences. Ivan Southall wrote of him in 1958: "Gentle as a dove, cunning as a fox, effortlessly he moulded the world to suit himself."

On leave in 1942, Truscott agreed to captain Melbourne against Richmond, where he led the team out in the No. 1 guernsey in front of 20,000 people. Melbourne lost the game by a very

large margin but the day became etched into the club's history as one of its favourite sons returned home. It was after this game that Keith Truscott, now a household name, met up with his high school headmaster, a link to his amateur days playing for MHSOB and was asked how he'd liked playing again. He replied, "Not for me. Too dangerous."

Truscott's death in 1943 shocked not only the football world, but the country. His plane crashed in Western Australia in March, after a training accident. An appeal immediately after his death resulted in a huge show of love, respect and support for the young man, with donations exceeding all expectations to build a special ward in the Royal Children's Hospital.

Keith "Bluey" Truscott was more than a great football player. He was an amateur taken to a higher level, but retaining his energy and charisma. His character left a lasting impression on the game, his name still echoing today with the presentation of the Melbourne Football Club Best and Fairest Trophy every year. Each generation of fans is inspired by his story, a legend born in the football world but transported far beyond, a good natured man, a skilled footballer, an inspiring war hero, whose playing roots are firmly dug into the Melbourne High School Old Boys' Football Club and the VFA.

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