

# NORWOOD MAGAREY MEDALLISTS BETWEEN THE WARS

*by Bernard Whimpress*

## 'Wacka' Scott

Walter Scott, better known as 'Wacka' or 'Wat' is the Norwood Football Club's most decorated player.

Born on 2 September 1899 in Stirling East, Scott first played football with an inflated pig's bladder at school but the Norwood influence began when he began his first job at the age of 13 as an apprentice electrician with the firm of Morrison and Gwynne. The three senior partners – J. Morrison, G.C. Gwynne and Algie Millhouse – were all Norwood footballers with Millhouse having captained the Redlegs in 1914.

At the time Scott lived in the city with an elder sister but used to return home for weekends. For this reason he played all his early football for Stirling in the Hills Association until 1919 when the other teams comprised, Onkaparinga, Woodside, Mount Barker and Strathalbyn.

A sensational high mark, despite standing just 5 foot 9 inches and weighing 11 stone, Scott joined Norwood in 1920. His first game was against Port Adelaide, and his first opponent was 'Shine' Hosking, the legendary 1910 Magarey Medallist then nearing the end of a great career. In his first season, Scott won Norwood's best and fairest trophy and should have been selected for South Australia but was discounted on the score of inexperience. Had he been chosen he would have been a member of the state side which achieved its first victory over the Victorian Football League at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

The following year, however, there was no stopping him. He moved to centre half-back with Norwood and made his state debut on a flank alongside Dan Moriarty and Jack 'Snowy' Hamilton, the latter regarded by his contemporaries as the champion footballer of the day.

It was a partnership without peer and the combination is often regarded as the greatest half-back line South Australia has produced.

Scott believed that 1921 was his best league season and he tied Moriarty for the Magarey Medal. At the time first votes only were awarded, one point per match. Scott gained five votes from 11 matches and Moriarty five from 14 matches. In the event of ties the matter was referred back to the umpires for adjudication. They could not make up their minds but after discussing the matter three times awarded the medal to Moriarty who this became the only man to win it three times in succession.

Scott died in 1989 and so was not around when the South Australian National Football League decided to follow the VFL (wrongly in my view), to retrospectively award medals to those who had tied, thus elevating him to triple-Magarey Medal status.

The 1922 season saw Norwood annex the premiership for the first time in fifteen years and Scott regarded this team as the best in which he played even though the Redlegs also went top in 1923, 1925 and 1929 to complete a successful decade.

## Tom Leahy

*The 1922 and 1923 premiership sides were coached by the 1913 Magarey Medallist Tom Leahy who had won that award with North Adelaide after previously having played with West Adelaide. Leahy was often regarded as the greatest ruckman in Australia in the first quarter of the twentieth century.*

*Leahy played in four premierships with West Adelaide and captained North Adelaide to its 1920 premiership success as well as being a fixture in state teams from 1905 to 1921.*

*The position of coach was not the supremo we now associate with football teams and most coaches then (and for a long time after) were playing coaches. Thus it has been usual to give much more credit for Norwood's successes to their captain Sid White who was captain from 1921-25, including coaching the side in 1925.*

Scott played in his first interstate carnival in Perth in 1921 under Leahy's captaincy but the Hobart Carnival of 1924 was rich in his memory: especially the occasion of warming saveloys over an open fire in a large dormitory-style bedroom he shared with six other players while it snowed outside. Some performances in the carnival were a joke and South Australia's score of 37.46 to Queensland's 4.2 should have been 70 goals if the team had kicked straight. As it was Scott's Norwood team-mate Roy Bent set a state record with 19 goals.

Norwood missed the premiership that year as West Torrens claimed its first title but Scott won the Magarey Medal under a new system of voting by umpires who awarded 3-2-1 votes in order of preference for the best three players afield. In addition to his brilliant marking his wonderful bursts out of defence were capped by precision passing.

Unlike the pomp and fanfare which became associated with the presentation of the Magarey Medal since the 1970s Scott received a letter from the South Australian Football League asking to present himself at the league's offices the following evening. The offices were then in Pirie Chambers and Scott, dressed in his best suit, hung his overcoat and hat on a hook at the foot of the stairs and entered the committee room. League president A.J. McLachlan then handed over the medal and added, 'Good night, Mr Scott.'

Scott maintained his form over the years and appeared in 38 consecutive interstate matches (an Australian record). He was a member of the first South Australian side to defeat Western Australia in Perth in 1925, was vice-captain of SA's great win over Victoria in Melbourne in 1926 and played in an exciting drawn game at the Adelaide Oval in 1928.

Continuing an almost fairy-tale record Scott was captain-coach of Norwood's 1929 premiership side but the 1930 season was memorable for him for the best and worst reasons. Another Magarey Medal crowned an illustrious playing career but his football days were effectively ended in the last minor round game when he badly injured a knee, snapping the cruciate ligaments in a game against Port Adelaide.

The injury finished him. He played no football in 1931 and just two games in 1932, Scott took over as non-playing coach in those two seasons at the end of which he had represented Norwood in 174 games and won six Redleg best and fairest awards. He later coached West Adelaide from 1933 to 1935, and Glenelg in 1936-37, although without premiership success, He was umpire's coach in 1939.

There is little doubt that Scott was one of the giants of Australian football during his time. In his star-studded career he was a member of the last team to wear the compulsory straw boater hats to the Perth Carnival. He played in the old chocolate and blue state uniforms and the new red, blue and gold.

An interesting contrast with today is what players used to eat before a game. Scott believed in nourishment and regularly ate a three-course meal consisting of soup, roast and sweets before either walking to a match, or catching a bus or tram. A noted all-round sportsman Scott also represented East Torrens in district cricket as a wicket-keeper and was chosen in a South Australian Colts side to play Victoria in 1921 but was unavailable. In later years he showed outstanding ability as a lawn bowler.

## Alick Lill

Alick Gladstone Lill was born at Stepney on 10 May 1904 and grew up in a number of suburbs – Magill, Hawthorn, Unley, Halifax Street in the city, Hindmarsh and Norwood.

At Flinders Street School he was too small and spindly to make the team and his first contact with league football was when his father bought a ham shop on the Port Road at Hindmarsh.

As a youngster he took a keen interest in West Torrens, peeping through the fence of the Hindmarsh Oval. Later he would sit and listen at the top of the stairs of the shop when David Low, the 1912 Magarey Medallist, would drop in for a chat after a game.

Lill took his Qualifying Certificate, the passport to many of the higher occupations, and attended Norwood High School for the next two years. Living in Clark Street, Norwood he practised his kicks near the Britannia Hotel and it was about this time that he

began to shoot up in height to the six foot three inches of his playing days.

Lill started work in the Taxation Department in 1918 and at the same time joined the newly formed Marryatville Juniors football and cricket club which played as an affiliate of the YMCA competition. The club was patronised by Sir Edwin Smith, the grand old man of South Australian sport, and played its matches near the junction of Wakefield Street and Dequetteville Terrace. Lill played for the club for five seasons and during that period had his first match on the Adelaide Oval against Thompson Memorial Church. In 1922 playing at centre half-forward he kicked 20 goals in a match and around 90 for the season.

His introduction to Norwood followed when after a game against Kenilworth on the Victoria Park Racecourse, a social evening was held in the Rechabite Hall, Norwood with the guest speaker being Norwood coach, Tom Leahy. That year Lill and a friend, Syd Poole, were asked to play in the Seconds grand final and Lill played at centre half-forward.

In 1923 both were invited to Norwood and as an 18-year-old Lill was opposed to the experienced Syd Ackland in the centre and took a number of sensational marks. He made the eighteen for the first match, playing in a forward pocket and at centre half-forward, but was dropped after three games. He returned, however, when Basil Scott ('Wacka's' brother and the regular centreman) was injured. Norwood's captain Syd White recalled his trial game a few weeks earlier and he returned to the centre. He was never dropped and rarely moved from the position again.

A brilliant high mark, Lill was also ambidextrous, able to pick the ball up and turn on to either foot at top speed. He first represented South Australia in a Second Eighteen in Melbourne in 1924 when the first team was at the Hobart Carnival. The next season, however, was his most memorable as he turned 21, won the Magarey Medal and played in Norwood's premiership side.

Lill won Norwood's best and fairest trophy three times in 1924, 1925 and 1927, the season he considered his best. He was runner-up to Bruce McGregor in the medal that year.

Lill played for South Australia from 1925 to 1930 with the exception of 1929 when he had a cartilage removed from a knee. A particularly brilliant exponent of fine weather football he excelled in a quagmire on the Adelaide Oval in a 1930 carnival match against Victoria.

Lill's playing career ended in 1931 after 123 games for Norwood and South Australia. That year he was appointed captain-coach but his knee collapsed when he stepped down from a table after delivering his first pre-match address at a trial game. He was still only 26 years old.

If it appeared that his coaching career was still-born nothing could have been further from the truth. In 1932 he coached Norwood's seconds and took over the league team in 1933. That year he took the Redlegs into the grand final against 'Shine' Hosking's West Torrens, offering to play in the match if required. He didn't and Norwood were defeated. His second season was not so successful and when the team slumped to seventh he was widely criticised and resigned at the end of the year.

Lill continued coaching before the Second World War with Prince Alfred Old Collegians and after with Pinnaroo, Salisbury and Clare. He won premierships with Pinnaroo and Clare while taking up country appointments with the Savings Bank of South Australia which he had joined in 1920 and remained with until 1969.

Outside football Lill was a notable tennis player in his younger days and won the South Australian Hardcourt Title. His only son, John, was also an outstanding sportsman, an international cricketer and centre half-forward for Norwood. After taking a doctorate in engineering he served for many years as secretary of the Melbourne Cricket Club.

## **Bill McCallum**

Bill McCallum was born and bred to play for Norwood. As a youngster he lived in Magill, Kensington Gardens and Norwood, and in the 1920s his boyhood heroes were 'Wacka' Scott, Alick Lill and Roy 'Cool Alec' Bent in a triumphant Redleg side.

Born on 10 October 1911 William Bramley McCallum was the second of two sons to play for Norwood, his brother Perc preceding him by one year.

As a teenager he played for the Kensington Gardens Football Club in the East Torrens Association, a team which was undefeated for five years, despite playing many of its matches in the centre of the Victoria Park Racecourse.

The difficulty posed by such a ground was that on many occasions players had not only to oppose a footballer from another team but a horde of spectators who would rush across the field to get a closer view of the horses, not caring about any football matches that may have been in progress.

Like most youths of his era McCallum was fiercely ambitious to play league football. The first step on the rung appeared to be the Seconds grand final in 1928 when he was selected for Norwood against North Adelaide. He was deeply disappointed when an attack of appendicitis prevented him from playing.

McCallum's first league game was in 1931 but after three games the spindly 6 foot 1 and a half inches, 11 and a half stone half-forward flanker was dropped. Determined to establish himself, however, he undertook vigorous physical exercise to gain weight and maintain good physical condition. In 1932 he was restored to the league side, playing much of the year at full-forward where he headed Norwood's goal-kicking list.

McCallum disliked the position though, preferring centre half-forward, which he filled when Jack Sexton was coach in 1935. Of all his coaches – 8 in 11 years of senior football – McCallum admired Sexton as 'the first and only psychological coach' he ever played under.

Sexton's early death in 1935 was a terrible blow to the club and his replacement, Syd Ackland, moved McCallum into the centre the following year.

## Jack Sexton

*Jack Sexton is a footnote figure at the Norwood Football Club because he played just 6 games for the Redlegs while coaching them during one season. But he is an interesting footnote.*

*Sexton began his league career at Glenelg in 1925, spent five years at the Bay, establishing himself a high calibre-centreman, before moving to West Adelaide in 1930-31 where he won the Magarey Medal in his second season.*

*At the height of the Depression and with better job prospects in Melbourne he moved to Fitzroy from 1932-34, captaining the club and forging strong friendships with brilliant team-mates Haydn Bunton and Doug Nicholls (later Pastor and Sir Douglas who became Governor of South Australia).*

*Living at Northcote, Sexton would often invite Bunton and Nicholls home for dinner on Sunday nights although it was said that Bunton was not so excited by the prospect of being taken by Nicholls to the local Church of Christ after the meal.*

*Sexton returned to South Australia in 1935 with his employment as a commercial traveller (a career also followed later by Bunton) with paper manufacturers Spicer & Detmold.*

*Sexton made a brilliant start to the 1935 season as captain-coach with the Redlegs winning six of the first seven games but he contracted pneumonia and pleurisy midway through the season and was hospitalised for seven weeks. He then began to recuperate and coached Norwood in the first semi-final only to suffer a relapse and die, aged 29, six weeks later.*

The switch to the centre for McCallum paid handsome dividends as he enjoyed an outstanding year, culminating in his Magarey Medal triumph and winning Norwood's best and fairest trophy. Oddly, McCallum played centre only that season as the position went to Albert 'Pongo' Sawley in 1937. For most of the latter part of his career McCallum played at centre half-back and full back.

A fine high mark he preferred flying late from the back of the pack. The big grabs meant that he was used as a key position player for

South Australia and he played every position down field with the exception of full-forward.

Perc McCallum retired in 1940 and coached the club in 1941, turning his younger brother into a knock ruckman. At 30 years of age this might have seemed a tall order but it proved successful as Norwood won its first flag since 1929 and McCallum's four goals from a forward-pocket proved a match-winning factor. The game was his last, however, as he joined the air force ending any further thoughts of football.

In 11 seasons he played 153 games for Norwood and six for South Australia. After the war he took umpiring for several years but gave it away when country trips cut too heavily into his weekends.

## Conclusion

Most of this research was conducted over 25 years ago and the stories were published as articles in the *South Australian Football Budget* when I edited that publication. Some of them, particularly those of Scott and Leahy wound up in my first book, *The South Australian Football Story* which appeared in 1983.

I've brought the material together in a new form tonight because I sometimes think there is value in revisiting old research.

The raw material is mainly drawn from interviews I did with Scott, Lill and McCallum and with the son of Jack Sexton. The first two were very old when I interviewed them and I was struck by their humility.

A lasting memory was the comment of Alick Lill when we were sharing a beer at the end of the interview. He said, 'You know, I've done two football interviews in my life. One when I won the medal in 1925 and this one with you in 1981. That's 56 years apart!'