

ST KILDA'S EXCITEMENT MACHINE

HE'D DO ANYTHING FOR HIS BELOVED SAINTS!

CHIEF FOOTBALL WRITER



MARK ROBINSON

NORMA Barker's withered hands clutch the lace-up jumper. She brings it to her face, closes her eyes, and takes a heaving breath. Then she cries.

"I can still smell him," she said.

She buried her face in it again.

"Oh dear," she said.

"I lost my little girl, too, you know. Katrina. She died when she was five with a congenital heart condition. Trevor was nine and he never got over losing his beautiful little sister.

"She got through the surgery OK, but she died about two weeks later."

That was in 1966.

"But they learnt from her. I got lovely letters from the Children's Hospital to say they saved so many other children. That was nice to hear."

Norma is the mother of Trevor Barker, arguably St Kilda's most loyal son.

Last night she accepted Barker's induction into the Australian Football Hall of Fame.

"He wouldn't be expecting anything like this because he was a team man and he never was looking for accolades," Norma told the *Herald Sun*.

"He would do anything for his beloved Saints, anything.

"A few clubs wanted him, but no way he'd leave. Hang on, he nearly did once. To Melbourne. I think it was Barassi. Was he with Melbourne?"



Barker died of cancer at 8am on April 26, 1996.

He was 39.

Six thousand people attended his funeral at Moorabbin Town Hall.

Barker was a Hollywood footballer. Charismatic, long blond hair, spectacular marks, tremendous courage and, Norma said, a real "ladies' man".

He wore No.1, often in long

sleeves, but on this day Norma had her son's old lace-up, borrowed for the afternoon from the St Kilda museum.

"I can still smell him," she said. "If you'd like me to put it on ... I'd like to do it."

Barker was a beacon of hope through a mediocre period for the Saints. And Barker, more than any player, embodied St Kilda's mantra: strength through loyalty.

He played his first game in 1975, played 230 games overall, was captain for four years and a two-time best-and-fairest winner. That award is now named in his honour.

Saints fans loved him, rival fans admired him.

His blond hair would streak across TV screens as Barker launched himself into packs and on to backs.

And his marking remains

among some of the iconic images in Australian rules.

Time and again, commentators would bellow "BARKER" in an excited voice, almost breaking down the pronunciation.

When he left the Saints, he coached Sandringham to two VFA premierships, in 1992 and 1994, before returning to the Saints as an assistant coach.

It seemed logical and writ-

ten in the stars that he would one day become senior coach.

Norma has many photos of her family and friends at her Cheltenham home.

One is of Barker at training at Moorabbin. "Look at the awful long hair," she said.

At 91, Norma was worried how she'd scrub up in the photograph with the jumper. "Should I put my spectacles on to hide my tears? I look 110."

AFL HALL OF FAME

Chatterbox reveals his Stack-tics

SAM BUNN

RICHMOND young gun Sydney Stack says he's still working on his professionalism following a heated exchange with coach Damien Hardwick last week at training.

Stack's stunning form, including a 24-disposal effort in the loss to North Melbourne, earned him Round 11's Rising Star nomination.

"(The training incident) was nothing big. I just rocked up late on the track and got sprayed, I guess. He (Hardwick) said sorry afterwards," Stack, 19, said yesterday.

"I'm still working on my professionalism and the older, senior guys are helping with that. I really get around this team of boys and ask them for advice and all that sort of stuff."

The exuberant Western Australian has built a reputation for having an energetic presence around the club.

Asked whether Hardwick had a soft spot for him, Stack said he preferred to keep his coach and teammates on their toes.

"I wouldn't say he has a soft spot (for me)," Stack said.

"I annoy everyone at the club, so Dimma (Hardwick) is probably one of my main people I annoy. I just love annoying people, so that's just me, I guess."

"I just talk to him and annoy him — keep on asking questions and stuff like that, keep him going."

EX-ROOS MAY JOIN REVIEW

JON RALPH

FORMER North Melbourne players Brady Rawlings and Peter Bell are likely to be sounded out as part of a comprehensive review of the club's football department.

The Kangaroos are working to establish the criteria for their search for a senior coach as they set up a sub-committee.

The club will also cast a wide net about elite staff across the AFL community.

Rawlings is list manager at West Coast after playing 245 games with North. He moved into the position in 2016 after following Adam Simpson out west.

Fremantle football boss Bell won two premierships and played 123 of his 286 AFL games with the Roos.

North Melbourne is reviewing its football department, conducted by former KPMG chairman Peter Nash, club great Glenn Archer, and board member Brian Walsh.

The club says interim coach Rhyce Shaw is a contender for the full-time role, but has admitted its list management direction is in limbo as it assesses its options.



Norma Barker (left), mother of St Kilda great Trevor, at her Cheltenham home. Barker pulls down a mark during a match against Footscray. Main picture: MICHAEL KLEIN



Trevor was nine and he never got over losing his beautiful little sister

divorced when Trevor was 16, would watch Trevor play at Bentleigh. "Yep, every week. Jack and I would get up, have a quick cuppa, and put the trackies over our PJs because it was so cold, it started at 8am.

"We loved it."

She knew he had something as a player. "I thought he had potential, yes."

By the time Trevor was at the Saints, Jack was gone, and she'd watch the game with girlfriends.

"We were called 'the back row' at Moorabbin. There were 14 of us sitting together. We were very loud. He would take those high marks and come down on his back. I would be worried. One day he got kicked in the face, and I sent one of my friends down to the rooms because we weren't allowed in the rooms in those days, mothers and women," she said.

Asked to describe him as a player, Norma said: "He was just the best. Well, I thought he was. He'd take great marks, he was a speedster, and he used to tackle well. He was a wonderful tackler."

Asked to describe him as a person, she said: "He was always my beloved son first and football was what he chose to do. He wasn't all that demonstrative, you know, for cuddles or anything like that, but we were very close."

"He loved footy. He used to play kick to kick over the back fence with the next-door neighbour, on Centre Dandenong Rd and Tilley (St). That's where he grew up."

Asked her favourite football moment, she said: "Seeing all the little ones running around with No.1 on their back. That gave me goosebumps. That was beautiful."

Asked her favourite all-time moment, she said: "When he was born. I always wanted

TREVOR BARKER

St Kilda 1975-89
230 games; 134 goals

- St Kilda captain: 1983-86
- St Kilda best & fairest: 1976, 1981
- State games (Vic): 6
- Sandringham coach: 1992-94 (VFA premierships 1992 & 1994)
- St Kilda Hall of Fame Legend
- St Kilda Team of the 20th Century

a boy and a girl, and he was my first. All I ever wanted to have in my life was a happy marriage and at least two children. I had an unhappy marriage and I lost my children.

"But I've had a good life."

INITIALLY, Trevor didn't tell his mum of the cancer.

"He coached Sandringham to two premierships and I noticed it then," she said.

"He was starting to get very dark circles under the eyes and it seemed to me he was getting sicker and sicker. When I'd see him, I'd say, 'Gosh, Trevor, you look thin, you look terrible'."

"He knew for quite some time, but he didn't say anything. I remember my mum, she was in hospital, and we went to visit her one day and Mum said, 'Trevor, are you all right? You don't look well'."

"My mum (Jane) picked it. Then one day, he came to Mum's home and broke the news."

Two years passed and he was dead.

When Trevor died, it seemed despair hounded her. "There's been highs and lows," Norma said. "You've got to soldier on and get on with your life because if you don't

the rest of the family is going to suffer. I decided I was going to be brave.

"You never think your children are going to die before you. So I decided I wasn't going to have any more. I wasn't meant to have them."

"Sometimes, but not very often, I have said, 'Why, why did I have two children and lose them both? What have I done wrong?' I do talk to God a bit. I thank him for the blessings and growl at him at the same time."

"But time heals all wounds. I still shed quiet tears, particularly when you see people out shopping with their children, so happy, and I think that could've been me. But I say to myself, keep a stiff upper lip."

She rushed to her bedroom and returned with a photograph of Katrina and Trevor.

"You can look at his adoring look to his little sister," she said.

"She was four. She started school and could only go for one month. When she was sick, she'd say, 'Don't cry, Mummy, I feel really well'."

"She knew she wasn't, but she kept telling me she was. You know, Jack and I were called in, and she passed away before we left the hospital."

Trevor was her everything after losing Katrina and then splitting with Jack. How could you possibly describe it?

That was 23 years ago, and people still tell her how much of a hero Trevor was.

HER invitation to last night's function came in the mail.

"I was so emotional and overwhelmed to think he would be on the list to join all those esteemed players," she said. "I got a letter from Gillon McLachlan ... do you want to see it?"

She slipped it on and barked: "How's that?"

She spun around as if on a catwalk.

TREVOR was a Cheltenham boy.

He attended Cheltenham High School and played footy for the first time at Bentleigh Tigers.

Norma and her husband Jack, who split and then