

EDWARD JAMES (TED) WHITTEN (1933 -1995)

The much loved 'Mr Football'

Edward James 'Ted' Whitten (1933-1995) was an immensely popular footballer and sports commentator who had made an indelible impression on an adoring public.

Whitten was given a nationally televised state funeral when he died in 1995. The E.J. Whitten Bridge on the Western Ring Road must be one of the few bridges in Australia named after a footballer, and his statue outside the Western Oval in Footscray attracts many admirers and tourists today.

Whitten was a master of the theatrical and when the news of his passing from prostate cancer was broken live on the popular TV program 'The Footy Show', host Eddie McGuire and panel members were shocked into silence, as was the live audience.

Although Ted's battle with terminal illness was well known, his death caused a tidal wave of emotion across the community. His final public send off from football was in June 1995 when he was driven in around the MCG in a white convertible while the Mariah Carey song 'Hero' was played over the PA system. Many of the people in the stands were crying openly as Ted, who had lost his sight and suffered a stroke, was given a standing ovation. This event, named the most memorable football event by The Age, is commemorated in the painting by Jamie Cooper commissioned by the AFL to mark 150 years of football.

Ted started his football career in the western suburbs and joined Footscray in 1951. His football talent was remarkable in that he could

kick equally well with either foot, had the ability to play any position on the field, had excellent ground and ball skills and had mastered the flick pass. When he retired in 1970 Ted had played 321 games at senior level, a record not beaten for some years. He had captained the team from 1957-1970.



His larrikin nature and showmanship won him the title of 'Mr Football' and made him a folk hero in the western suburbs. Ted was an excellent commentator on radio and TV.

His experience of the game and his rapport with players coupled with his quick wit made him someone who had both inside running on what was happening outside the game and expert knowledge to interpret what was happening on the field.

The E.J. Whitten Legends Game raises funds for prostate cancer research in his memory. His induction as one of 12 inaugural legends into the Australian Football Hall of Fame ensures his memory will not be forgotten. Ted's ashes lie in Altona Memorial Park.

Find out more

Eva, B. *Ted Whitten: Legend of the Australian Football Hall of Fame*, (2013)

Harvey, P. & Ross, J. *The Ted Whitten Album*, (2003)

Whitten T. with Maine, J. et al, *E.J.* (1995)



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Jan is a professional historian who has worked across the fields of heritage, education and tourism. She has taught at several universities, including Monash University where she delivered the master of public history course. She is also a former Chair of the Heritage Council of Victoria. Jan was appointed to The Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust in 2010.



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