



Goalie waves flag on record career

Nowhere among the cavalcade of retirees feted at the MCG on grand final day did you see David Flegg, although his contribution to AFL matches should not go unrecognised.

David, an MCC member for more than 25 years, retired as a goal umpire at the end of the season after a VFL/AFL record 337 matches. After breaking the previous mark of 335 games, he manned the MCG goal square one last time in the Round 23 Hawthorn-Western Bulldogs encounter before calling it a day.

"I've seen too many people go on one year too long, both players and umpires," the 47-year-old said of his decision to retire, after coming back from an injury-riddled 2010. "I could see my performance slipping slightly, so I felt the time was right."

David's resume is formidable. He umpired three grand finals (1991, 1993 and 2006), 19 finals and two international matches. He was declared Goal Umpire of the Year by the AFL Umpires' Association (AFLUA) on no fewer than seven occasions.

Off the field, his passion for umpiring knows no bounds. A life member of the AFLUA, he has served as the association's historian/statistician for nearly 20 years,

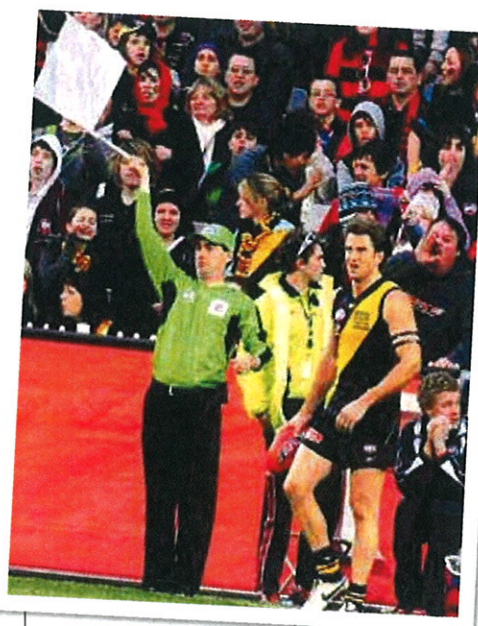
meticulously compiling the records of every VFL/AFL umpire in the history of the game, among other worthy projects.

"David is considered one of the greatest contributors to umpiring within Australian football," said Victorian Football Umpires' Association president Peter Kelly. "His extraordinary achievements at the highest level are matched by a contribution to the broader football umpiring community."

Reflecting on his career highlights, David says it's hard to go past those three grand finals. The first in '91 at Waverley was particularly special because he umpired with close friend and fellow MCC member Leigh Keen. However, earning selection for the 2006 decider meant just as much because of the 13-year wait to return to the last Saturday in September. And he awarded the final goal (to Ben Cousins) in what was ultimately a one-point result.

Of 1993, he says "no" before the question is finished. He wasn't the umpire who adjudicated the famous Michael Long running goal in the decider that Stephen Silvagni so animatedly claimed to have touched. He was at the other end!

David was approached by the AFL within a week of retirement to be a trainee timekeeper



in 2012. It was an offer he accepted gladly, even if it means he'll have fewer opportunities to use his MCC membership.

"I use my membership to watch the cricket more than anything else, because I haven't needed it to access footy matches," he says. "After retiring, I went to every AFL final this year in the Members Reserve. To be a member and to be able to use those wonderful facilities any time I like, it's fantastic."

One suspects it may be some time before this dedicated member of the umpiring fraternity has a free weekend in winter. But the game of football is better for that.

Member Jim lends a helping hand

As the third anniversary of the Black Saturday bushfires draws near, it is timely to acknowledge MCC 50-year member Jim Usher's contribution to a book that has raised \$100,000 for CFA brigades involved in the firefight.

The book, *Footsteps in the Ash*, is a record of the devastation of the St Andrews and Strathewen communities where 37 people died and 117 homes were lost in the intense February 2009 fires.

Jim and co-author Mac Gudgeon interviewed 80 survivors and 65 firefighters to compile the 276 pages of compelling stories and photographs.

Both are long-term residents of St Andrews and were close to becoming victims of the

fires themselves. Flames were less than a kilometre from their homes when a wind change swept the fires in a new direction, at the same time killing many of their friends including actor Reg Evans and his artist partner Angela Brunton.

They worked on the interviews and photographs for 10 months, in the process becoming a listening post for the trauma of locals, many of whom are still working through the tragic events of that day.

"To this day, I can't believe how most of those we interviewed survived," Jim said. "Their stories are harrowing and a tribute to the capacity of the human survival spirit, but there were also many miracles that day. "People survived fighting the fires in their

homes, or sheltering in dams and swimming pools, in pipes under the road, in culverts and even wombat holes. Two families, one with a young baby, buried themselves in the mud of Diamond Creek.

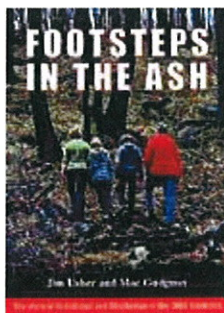
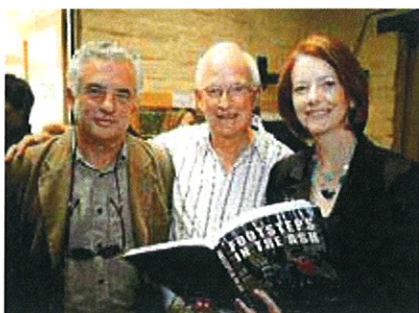
"They were saved when a sudden gush of water seemingly came from nowhere, dousing the flames from burning embers that had crashed around them. When they emerged from under the shelter of a blanket, two lyrebirds were peering curiously at them," Jim said.

He also told of another story where a mother of two young girls stood on a kitchen table and screamed at the fire as it burst through the ceiling: "You are not going to take my children."

Production of the book was a full-scale community effort. Everyone who worked on it did so gratis, enabling the entire proceeds from the 5000 copies sold to be distributed to the St Andrews and Arthurs Creek/Strathewen CFAs, with contributions to other brigades that helped fight the fires in the two communities.

Jim joined the MCC in 1957 and received his 50-year membership four years ago. His sister, Jill Grace, is an MCC guide.

There are fewer than 100 copies of the book remaining for sale. They are available via phone (03 9808 6622) or at www.bpabooks.com.



Authors Mac Gudgeon (left) and Jim Usher with then Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard at the launch of *Footsteps in the Ash*.