

Thomas J Leahy

The son of George Joseph Leahy (1861-1910), and Annie Mary Leahy (1860-1929), née McKenzie, Thomas Joseph Leahy was born at Goodwood, South Australia on 13 January 1888. He married Agnes Shannon on 29 November 1917. They had one daughter, Betty.

Leahy was educated at Christian Brothers College in Wakefield Street, Adelaide. He played school football, as well as for Albert Park in the (Junior) Adelaide and Suburban Youths' Association competition.

As a player, Leahy was highly regarded for his playing ability and his nature. The 6 ft 4 in (193 cm), raw-boned Leahy had an iron constitution and massive hands; he was famous for holding the ball in one hand when preparing to kick. Leahy played 58 games for West Adelaide, 111 for North Adelaide, and 20-31 games for South Australia (depending on which source you read). Known throughout Australia as 'The Prince of Ruckmen', Tom Leahy was arguably the most widely celebrated footballer produced in South Australia prior to the onset of the television age. The reasons for his high reputation were legion. In the first place, he possessed all the skills necessary to succeed as a ruckman in the 'ruck shepherd era', a time when the primary objective of the second player in a ruck combination (the player who would later metamorphose into the ruck-rover) was to impede and interfere with the opposition's main ruckman in an effort to prevent him from contesting the knock. Leahy's strength, intelligence and athleticism enabled him to counter these tactics better probably than anyone.

Secondly, despite being the object of unrestrained and often illegal vigour on the part of his opponents, Tom Leahy always maintained a cheerful, unflustered demeanour, and never retaliated. This is not to suggest for a moment that his play lacked aggression; however, his aggression was always controlled, and seldom transcended standards of what was acceptable, both legally and morally.

Tom Leahy retired as a player in April 1922, by which time Norwood was already playing internal trial games in preparation for the season commencing in May. By the end of April he had accepted an offer to coach Norwood, as reported in a newspaper at the time:

The Register (Adelaide, SA : 1901 - 1929) Saturday 29 April 1922, Page 5

TOM LEAHY.

COACH FOR NORWOOD.

Tom Leahy, who was so long and honourably associated with the North Adelaide Football Club— he was captain for many years — on Friday afternoon, after much pressure, accepted the position of coach of the Norwood Club. Footballers generally will rejoice that this popular veteran's knowledge and experience are not being lost to the game. Mr. Leahy, if he had consulted his own feelings, would have preferred to retire

from the game, but his intimate friends have advised, him that for health's sake it would be wise for him to continue in training, and this will be possible in the position he has assumed.

After leaving coaching, Leahy wrote about Football in the Adelaide press. In 1935 he accepted a position on the tribunal which heard charges against reported players, so that he could protect them from unwarranted suspensions. He was belatedly appointed a life member of the South Australian National Football League in 1945 and in 1944-64 was the resident officer at Football House, Hindmarsh Square. In 1946 he helped to form the Past Players and Officials Association. Leahy also lectured and wrote about the evolution of the game. Leahy was courteous, obliging and always ready to help a young player. Scrupulously fair, he ignored attempted bribes.

Leahy died in the Royal Adelaide Hospital on 7 May 1964 and after a requiem Mass in St Francis Xavier's Cathedral, he was buried in Centennial Park cemetery.

West Adelaide Career

- Player 1905-09 (58 games)
- Best and Fairest – 1906
- Premiership player – 1908, 1909
- Champions of Australia team member, 1908
- Patriotic team – 1918

North Adelaide Career

- Player – 1910-1915; 1919-21 (111 games)
- Best Follower – 1910
- Most Efficient Services - 1912
- Magarey Medallist – 1913
- SANFL Football Budget Player of The Year – 1914
- Evening Post Player of the Year – 1913 (public vote)
- Best & Fairest – 1911, 1914, 1919
- Captain – 1915; 19-21
- Premiership player – 1920
- League Coach – 1913, 1919
- Life Member - 1921
- Hall of Fame - 2015
- Team of the Century - 2000

South Australian Representative Career

- State Captain – 1919-21
- 20-31 State Games, 1906 - 1921
- South Australian Football Hall of Fame – 2002
- State representative in the sport of handball – 1907
- SANFL Life Member - 1945

Norwood Career

- League Coach 1922-24

- Premiership coach 1922, 1923. (Runner up in 1924).

Chris Brown, August 2022

Sources:

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North Adelaide Football Club website, "Hall of Fame" – www.nafc.com.au

Trove - *The Register (Adelaide, SA : 1901 - 1929) Saturday 29 April 1922, Page 5*

Wikipedia website – Tom Leahy (footballer).