

THE FOUNDERS

There are many parallels in the careers of Hugh McLean and Ron Bush, the founders of the Barbarians Club in New Zealand. Both came from families with a sporting background, both succeeded in sports outside rugby, both were teammates in the Auckland rep teams as well as both being All Blacks. Such a close background as well as being good friends made them ideally suited to found this great club.

The first contact between the McLean and Bush families came long before either was born. Their fathers Jack McLean and George Bush sat together (and no doubt played football in the playground) at Victoria Avenue school in Wanganui. The Bush family moved to Wellington later where George attended the Mt. Cook school and captained the school rugby side — a team which included no less a youngsters than future All Black Billy Wallace. He went on to represent Canterbury at rugby, as did his brother Charlie, who also played for Wellington between 1898 and 1905.

George Bush was a versatile sportsman, a keen gymnast, an oarsman with the Wellington Rowing club and a keen boxer. He was later a prominent boxing referee, President and a Life Member of the Auckland Boxing Association.

It was little wonder that his two sons should also become active sportsmen. Ron was born in Nelson in 1909 and after his primary schooling at the Tasman St school he shifted with his family to Auckland where after a term at Auckland Grammar he transferred to the newly opened Mt. Albert Grammar. Here he had an outstanding career becoming Head Prefect and captain of both the 1st XV and the 1st XI.

The McLean family stayed in Wanganui a little longer. Jack together with three of his brothers Billy, Bob and Charlie all played rugby for Wanganui. Billy and Bob were both amongst the founders of the great Wanganui club Kaierau and had long representative careers. Billy a member of the first Wanganui rep side in 1888 was still playing in 1901. Jack McLean a hooker in the two fronted scrum, came into the rep team in 1896 and played until 1904. It is little wonder that his four sons all had close associations with the game. Hugh who was born in 1907 was the most outstanding player but his older brother Gordon and younger brother Bob both played rep football and Terry became known as one of New Zealand's outstanding sports journalists with a particular emphasis on rugby — a game

that he has written numerous books on.

The McLean family left Wanganui in 1921 and Hugh attended Napier Boys High School where surprisingly he failed to make the first XV. This he puts down to being a late developer. He played for the Hastings club and in 1926 graduated to the seniors alongside greats like Morrie Brownlie, Bert Grenside, Alex Kirkpatrick and Sam Gemmell all past or future All Blacks. A cartilage injury early in the season however, put a premature end to his first season of senior football.

In 1927 he had shifted to Wellington where he joined the Wellington club and in 1928 made his rep debut against Taranaki at Hawera. In 1927 Hugh also joined the Wellington Rowing Club and in his first year won a place in the New Zealand eight for the 1928 Olympic Games. As was common in those days funds could not be found to send the eight and the 21 year old was denied a trip to Amsterdam Olympics. His rugby career continued to develop however and after a season with Taranaki in 1929 he returned to Wellington where he won selection for the final two tests of the 1930 series against Prentice's British tourists. He marked his international debut by scoring two of the team's three tries in a 15-10 victory.

In the meantime Ron Bush's career had also been progressing well. After leaving school in 1927 he joined the Training College club in Auckland and made his rep debut at fullback for Auckland 'B' against Bay of Plenty and later in the season for the 'A' side against Hawkes Bay. By 1929 he had joined the University club and playing as a midfield back played three 'tests' for New Zealand Universities against their Australian counterparts before appearing in eight matches for Auckland. One of these matches on September 7th at New Plymouth Ron Bush and Hugh McLean opposed each other for the first time. Ron landed a conversion and penalty but the home team prevailed 14-11. In 1931 when Ron was taking a physical education course at Otago University he won his sole All Black cap when he was chosen as fullback against the touring Australians at Eden Park. With a grand exhibition of goal kicking Ron kicked home the New Zealand team by landing four penalties and a conversion in a 20-13 win. Hugh wasn't included in this test but in 1932 toured Australia with the All Blacks playing in both tests. At the end of 1933 he shifted to Auckland



An historical photo showing club founders Hugh McLean and Ron Bush at Thames in 1937 during the weekend when the idea to found the club was conceived.

and joined the Grafton club for the 1934 season. In the first rep match of the season against Waikato in the old traditional King's Birthday match at Hamilton the two teamed up in the same side for the first time.

Three years later and after Hugh had the Barbarian seed sown by Emile de Lissa during the 1935-36 All Black tour of Britain, the two founded the Barbarian Rugby Football club in circumstances described by Hugh in a separate article. The close association continued in the war years when both men went overseas with the 18th

Battalion and continued with their reunion after the war. In 1947 both played their last matches for the Barbarians.

Since that time both have maintained a close interest in the club and its wellbeing. An indication of that interest came during the war when Ron was a prisoner of war in Italy he formed a Barbarian club which played both football and basketball.

The club is most fortunate that their founders were such men.