

CHAPTER 13

TONY LOCKETT

Born: 9 March 1966

Debut: 17 years old

Last game: 36 years old

Height: 191 cm **Weight:** 104 kg

VFL/AFL career: 1st most goals kicked in VFL/AFL records
– 1360 goals

St Kilda: 183 games from 1983–1994, 1st most goals
kicked for the club, 3 seasons 100 or more goals
(1987, 1991, 1992)

Sydney: 98 games from 1995–2002, 5th most goals
kicked for the club, 3 seasons 100 or more goals
(1995, 1996, 1998)

For all of his sublime talents, the clean pick-ups on the run before turning and snapping truly from 50 metres on either foot, the power marking or copybook kicking for goal, it was the fear factor that set Tony ‘Plugger’ Lockett apart from every other full forward.

Doug Wade had it to a healthy degree in the 1960s and ’70s, and Brian Taylor could become decidedly testy in the

1980s, but neither put the fear of God into opponents like Lockett did over his 17-year career from 1983 to '99.

And that's ultimately the determining factor when the 20 other living full forwards to have kicked the ton in a season, or their opponents over the journey, were asked who they would pick at full forward to win a grand final tomorrow.

Not surprisingly, Jason Dunstall has his admirers, as does another legendary Hawk in Peter Hudson, while 100-club members such as Gary Ablett Snr, Malcolm Blight and Alex Jesaulenko are all looked upon as being top picks for any 'best of' side – but not at full forward.

Lockett wins that vote, with Dunstall himself declaring his complete admiration for the St Kilda and South Melbourne spearhead: 'It would be Plugger all day. It didn't matter if he was in a good team or poor team, or if he was double-teamed, he was big enough to still do it all. The amazing thing about his time at St Kilda, it didn't matter how bad they were going, he would still get the job done. He was also the best kick for goal with that short, steady, calm routine where the ball virtually went like a dart.'

And then there was the intimidation, perhaps best captured by Footscray full back of the 1980s Rick Kennedy. In 1986 Kennedy was at the peak of his powers, a 25-year-old who in that season represented Victoria in State of Origin. He travelled to the Western Oval on 14 June for a round 12 clash with St Kilda with a sense of anticipation in the knowledge his 20-year-old opponent Lockett was going to clearly become one of the game's greats. Indeed a year later Lockett would



Tony Lockett marks during a match against Hawthorn in 1998. One of the three seasons that Lockett kicked 100 goals for the Sydney Swans. (NEWS LTD / NEWSPIX)

become the first, and only, full forward to win the Brownlow Medal.

‘That game was the day my head clashed with Tony’s fist. In fact I kept bashing his fist with my head 12 times,’ Kennedy laughed. ‘I reckon I only missed making contact twice. Tony had me pinned and there wasn’t a lot I could do about it. He was apprehended by four umpires and ended up copping just two weeks, which wasn’t a bad result for him. In my evidence I said “to be honest I can’t remember any incident besides hitting the ground”.’ Lockett, who had been held goalless by Kennedy that day, pleaded guilty, claiming he had thrown just one punch out of frustration: ‘Rick had grabbed me and I swung my arms back to break loose,’ Lockett said. ‘That’s when we both fell to the ground and arms were flying everywhere. But I only struck him once.’

That was contradicted by field umpire John Russo, who said he saw ‘player Lockett holding him (Kennedy) with the left hand and punching with the right hand. Player Kennedy was underneath just trying to protect himself. It was difficult to count (how many punches) but at least eight or 10.’

They were different times, when what happened on the field stayed on the field that Kennedy enjoyed: ‘I always found him good to play on because he just played the game hard. We didn’t speak much, although a couple of times out at VFL Park when the ball was up the other end he said “it’s a bit bloody cold, isn’t it?” Given he came from Ballarat I figured it must have been really bloody cold.’

Tony Lockett

A year after Kennedy attempted to ‘bash Lockett’s head with his fist’, the pair met at Moorabbin with the Ballarat boy requiring seven goals to kick his ton.

‘He needed seven and kicked eight. I was trying to find somewhere, or dig a hole, to hide. We played on each other nine or 10 times and I like to think it evened out (Lockett kicked just 22 goals in nine games against Kennedy). He was very hard to play on, the hardest for me along with Jason Dunstall and Bernie Quinlan. Once Tony got in front on a lead it was just about impossible to get around or over him. And he was a great kick. No regular full forwards kick at 70 per cent today.’

North Melbourne full back Mick Martyn saw more of Lockett during the 1990s: ‘Where do you start with Tony Lockett? What was he, 110 kg, so I had to get up to around 105 kg to try and match him? He was deceptively quick over 10 metres, a big strong mark and maybe the best kick for goal I saw. I had a lot of respect for him. Playing on him at Moorabbin was like the Punch and Judy show. Unfortunately for me Plugger wanted to be Punch. It used to be on for young and old,’ said Martyn.

Geelong’s Gary Malarkey was nearing the end of his career when he met up with Lockett, but saw enough to be thankful he didn’t see more of him: ‘He was a bit too strong for me. Just the complete player and definitely one of the best. If he was playing today he would still find a way to kick a bundle,’ said Malarkey.

And then there was the prince of full backs, Stephen ‘SOS’ Silvagni: ‘Tony Lockett could do everything. Aggressive, a

beautiful kick, quick, and he had surprising agility. It was so hard to get your fist to the ball to spoil when he was on the lead. When you look at the top three in Lockett, Dunstall and Ablett, they are hard to split. He kicked 10 goals on me and I think that was the most,' said Silvagni.

The 10 goals were at Moorabbin in round 2 of 1989 when Lockett kicked 78 goals in just 11 games before injury ruined his shot at the 150-goal season record held jointly by Bob Pratt and Peter Hudson. And even though he kicked 10 on him, Lockett always rated Silvagni the best he played on.

'As a young bloke I started off on Carlton's Bruce Doull and that was as hard as it got. I just wanted to get a kick, let alone a goal. When Bruce retired he left the door open for another bloke who went okay called Stephen Silvagni. I had a dozen years against SOS and to this day rate him as my greatest opponent,' said Lockett.

'I did kick 10 on him one day which I thought was pretty good, and when you kick 10 on SOS you are allowed to mention it. That was in 1989 I had one of those days when things happened and I liked it at Moorabbin. But the next year at Waverley I hardly got a kick, so SOS got his revenge.

'Chris Langford was another hard opponent, plus there were a couple of intelligent blokes with hard heads in Micky Martyn and Rick Kennedy. I loved Mick Martyn and thought he was great for the game. We had some real good wrestles, it was good fun.'

At St Kilda, Lockett played under a succession of coaches, from Tony Jewell to Graeme Gellie, Darrel Baldock, Allan

Davis, Ken Sheldon and Stan Alves. His only finals action came in 1991 and '92, when his former teammate Sheldon came back as coach and revitalised the Saints.

'The bigger the occasion, the better he played in my view. He embraced pressure. I remember the last game of the 1992 season when we had to beat Melbourne to make sure we made the finals. Stewie Loewe was out injured so we played Danny Frawley at centre half-forward,' said Sheldon, 56.

'My three-quarter time address was simply, *If we can get this down to Plugger he will kick four and we will win the game.* And that was it. And you know what, he kicked four and we won. Before addressing the team, I'd gone to him and asked if he had the energy left. Coaching could sometimes be an easy caper when Tony was in the side.

'He was brutal with the football and one of those rare players who could drag others along with him. When he was fit the bar lifted everywhere, on the training track, in the clubrooms and obviously out on the ground. He could have played in other positions because he attracted the football. But he was a goalkicking machine so you were doing the side a disservice by not playing him there. He kicked 100 twice when I coached him and would have kicked 100 in the other two seasons but for injuries.

'And of course he had the fear factor. Sides would drop a player back and Tony would say "if you are going to stand there all day mate, just be aware that I'm coming". Or he might just walk up to the bloke and put his knees into the bloke's rear, and say, "That's where it will be if you stay there." He

would have a smirk on his face but history shows he carried out what he said.'

Lockett had begun his career at North Ballarat, the home of other well-known Saints in Mick Malthouse and Greg Burns. His father Howard Lockett, also known as Plugger, had been a local legend with both the North Ballarat Roosters and Lexton Tigers and had no trouble convincing the younger Plugger to follow in his footsteps.

'I craved footy as a young bloke. I was always having a kick of the footy like all kids do and I was always going to be a footballer. When I went to Melbourne I became a full forward but I was more of a centre half-forward when I went down,' said Lockett on the occasion of his induction as a Legend into the AFL Hall of Fame in 2015.

'But I found a nice little patch of ground in the St Kilda goal square and once I got there I didn't want to give it up. I turned up at Princes Park one Saturday in my first year and my name was at full back. I thought someone was having a joke. Then the coach came up and told me I wouldn't be kicking any goals because he had put me at full back,' said Lockett.

'So I snuck back into the coach's room to see who I was playing on. Lo and behold I had Peter Bosustow, a superstar player for Carlton. I remember running out and heading down towards full back and seeing a couple of Carlton players thinking, *Where's this idiot going, he must be lost*. Buzz was rubbing his hands together to see the fat kid with the sausage arms coming towards him. I had a good day, getting a career-high 24 kicks, 18 coming from me kicking the ball in.'

In terms of other full forwards, Lockett has always spoken of his respect for his long-time Hawthorn rival Jason Dunstall: 'I had a great rivalry with Bunghole (Dunstall) with no animosity, in fact we're mates. We kicked each other along. I don't know about him but I was always keen to see how many he had kicked. I used to say to Spud (Danny Frawley) keep him quiet, keep him quiet.

'Over the course of a lot of years we spurred each other on. I was hellbent on kicking more than him. I was lucky enough to play a state game with him, which was a great thrill. And of course playing with Gary Ablett on the Ted Whitten day at the MCG is one of my great memories. Looking over and seeing one of my teammates was Gary Ablett, it doesn't get much better than that.'

For all his fame, Lockett was never one to seek the spotlight and after finally retiring from the Sydney Swans following an ill-fated comeback in 2002, he quickly disappeared from the scene he had dominated for close to two decades.

These days he's happier chasing a Hereford or Angus steer on his beloved motorbike, or being a good dad to his four daughters at the family farm at Bowral, than bothering with the hype of the AFL world. That was never for him, the glitz and glamour, and he only found himself amongst it because of a rare God-given talent. 'Two Ton Tony', as Lou Richards dubbed him, didn't even think of breaking the AFL goals record of Gordon Coventry which sat at 1299. That was until Tony passed the 1000 goal mark. In the end Tony booted 1360.

‘That record was a lot of years’ work but not something I was aiming at until the last couple of years when I even thought about it. I’m very proud of it. I could have been more applied in my craft but what you see is what you get. Not everyone can be built like a great athlete. Lou Richards nicknamed me Two-Ton Tony when I’d had too many doughnuts. They used to say when the players were doing their warm-up they’d run two laps around me.’

That was the lighter side of Lockett that the public, and certainly his opponents, rarely saw because intimidation was a very big part of the ‘Plugger’ package. To a degree we will surely never see his like again.

TONY LOCKETT – S STATISTICS

ST KILDA – 1987								
Opponent	Round	Result	Kicks	Marks	Handballs	Disposals	Goals	Behinds
Geelong	1	L	4	4	6	10	2	1
Fitzroy	2	L	8	5	2	10	5	1
Brisbane Bears	3	W	8	3	2	10	3	
Melbourne	4	L	18	14	2	20	12	3
North Melbourne	5	L	10	7	3	13	5	3
Footscray	6	L	3	1	1	4		1
Richmond	7	W	13	6	2	15	6	3
West Coast	8	W	15	12	1	16	7	6
Collingwood	9	L	5	4	3	8	2	2
Hawthorn	10	L	8	4	4	12	5	3
Essendon	11	L	11	7	1	12	9	
Carlton	12	L	7	5		7	3	2
Sydney	13	L	6	8	5	11	3	
Geelong	14	L	10	7	3	13	1	2
Fitzroy	15	W	13	8	2	15	5	4
Brisbane Bears	16	W	13	12	1	14	8	3
Melbourne	17	W	15	14	3	18	9	3
North Melbourne	18	W	16	9	3	19	8	3
Footscray	19	W	10	10		10	8	2
Richmond	20	L	5	3	2	7	3	1
Collingwood	21	W	17	13		17	8	6
West Coast	22	L	11	8	3	14	5	3
Totals		22 (9-0-13)	226	164	49	275	117	52

ST KILDA – 1991								
Opponent	Round	Result	Kicks	Marks	Handballs	Disposals	Goals	Behinds
Adelaide	7	W	19	15	2	21	12	6
Brisbane Bears	8	W	13	8	1	14	10	3
Sydney	9	W	14	9	2	16	12	2
Essendon	10	L	5	2		5	4	
Hawthorn	11	W	10	8	4	14	7	3
North Melbourne	12	W	6	3	1	7	5	1
Fitzroy	13	W	9	7	3	12	8	
Footscray	14	W	9	6	3	12	5	3
West Coast	15	L	14	10	3	17	8	5
Richmond	16	W	13	11		13	5	7
Geelong	17	L	6	4	3	9	2	2
Melbourne	18	L	7	4		7	5	1
Collingwood	19	L	5	5	2	7	1	3
Carlton	21	W	16	12	1	17	13	3