

What does Eddie's departure mean for Nathan Buckley?

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February 10, 2021

Eddie McGuire's departure as Collingwood supremo heralds an obvious leadership change at the Magpies. But what his departure means for their next most high-profile leader, coach Nathan Buckley, is unclear.

It is doubtful in a football sense it means anything much at all.



Eddie McGuire with Nathan Buckley in 2009. McGuire orchestrated the succession plan from Mick Malthouse (far left) to Buckley.

Buckley is out of contract at the end of the season. McGuire, who orchestrated Buckley's appointment through a succession plan in 2012, was viewed as one of the coach's supporters and his departure raises the question as to whether it will affect the degree of support for Buckley.

Club insiders insist, however, that it does not. Sources say the strongest backers Buckley had when the club last extended his contract were the two men who authored the searching review of the football department in 2017 – Peter Murphy and Geoff Walsh – and not the board members or president.

Walsh and Murphy pushed heavily for Buckley to be recontracted and for other changes to be made within the football department. Having commissioned the review, McGuire and his board strongly backed its recommendations.

Walsh departed the club at the end of last season and has been replaced by Graham Wright as head of football, while Murphy, who was then a consultant, has since joined the board and is now highly likely to be elected by the board to replace McGuire as president.

The club anticipates the more immediate impact for Buckley of McGuire's decision to stand down is that it will redirect criticisms and calls for leadership change at the club from McGuire to Buckley.

Former player Heritier Lumumba has been highly critical of Buckley's handling of him at Collingwood and those criticisms are expected to intensify with McGuire gone.

A friend of Lumumba's immediately commented on social media after McGuire stood down that Buckley should also go.

Buckley has not commented on the *Do Better* report since it was released. The report focused criticism on the executive and the board for the systemic failings and the culture of defensiveness and protection of key individuals. Thus it has been the president, board and executive that have had to answer questions to date.

Regardless, given he has been a senior leader at the club for an extended period, both as captain for nine years and coach since 2012, it would be worthwhile hearing from Buckley on the report.

There are important questions about the club's culture raised in the report, but the more searching questions most likely asked of Buckley this year will be about results.

The club took aggressive steps in the trade period to address a heaving salary cap. The massive salary dump came after the club had moved away from flag contention year on year over the last three years, and after years of kicking the problem of crazy contracts down the road.

Having reviewed and rewarded Buckley with a contract extension in 2017, Collingwood contended for a flag the next year in 2018. They played a preliminary final in 2019 and a semi-final last year. The incremental steps away led to the idea that not only did the salary cap need to be addressed, so too did the list.

It was no longer seen as a list able to contend and action was taken before the Pies dropped radically away. The intriguing thing will be how Buckley is viewed for the team's on-field performance this season, given the degree of change they instigated.

Whether Eddie is still there or not to be involved in passing judgment on the coach and the team is unlikely to materially affect whether Buckley is given a contract extension, according to Collingwood sources.