

## **Eddie McGuire failed to identify his use-by date and, when forced out, portrayed himself as the victim**

*Barrie Cassidy*

*Even as the Collingwood president quit he failed to seriously address the club's descent into racism and its woefully inadequate response*



*Eddie McGuire has quit as the president of Collingwood. But his final press conference was too much a pitch for sympathy rather than an honest assessment of the issue that brought about his downfall, Barrie Cassidy says.*

Tue 9 Feb 2021

After 22 years at the head of a major sporting club, leaving should be the easy part. That's long enough for anybody – there's a legacy to draw on and a straight forward "time to go" message to run with.

But sadly, Eddie McGuire's parting shots were anything but dignified, and far short of what supporters needed to hear in order to better understand the magnitude of the issues facing Collingwood and the challenges that now lie ahead.

Partway through McGuire's presentation, sports analyst Richard Hinds asked rhetorically on Twitter whether he was resigning as president or accepting a knighthood.

There was a litany of achievements, ordinarily to be expected when a leader leaves after a long time in the job. Many of them will be referenced by others in the days to come.

The move away from Victoria Park to a magnificent inner city sporting hub was both necessary and outstandingly successful. Collingwood became a far more professional organisation under McGuire's care.

He was a major contributor as the AFL became a national sport. And he understood as well as anybody that football has to entertain.

But much of what he said at Tuesday's news conference – the emergence of netball and women's football, the outreach into philanthropic activities – is now part and parcel of what the biggest sporting clubs do as routine. And so they should.

What was missing? Why is he leaving now? What brought about this change of mind? McGuire volunteered only a few seconds to that.

"I tried my best but I don't always get it right." He said the club needed clear air as did the sponsors. Apart from that he didn't want the players to be distracted.

Too much of the rest of it was a pitch to the sympathy vote; an attempt to portray himself as the victim.

That might seem harsh but the circumstances that brought this about are too important to be airbrushed away.

Once again the key issue, the club's descent into racism and its woefully inadequate immediate response to that, was not part of the narrative.

McGuire's departure after 22 years is a major media moment. But so too are the club's systemic problems. They need to be faced up to squarely and honestly. They need to be put right.

Those who initially encouraged McGuire to hang in there were wrong to do so. He wanted extra time to address the issues. But for better or worse that was going to be done as part of an attempt to save McGuire's legacy. That, at the outset, is the wrong framework for such an undertaking.

That would have meant yet again putting the individual ahead of the club. It was never the better way to go.

Now, the board members have to consider whether they operated at their best with McGuire at the helm, or whether they can now bring even more value to the table in his absence.

A spill would not be desirable so close to the start of a new season. But more of the same will never do.

Big sporting clubs have to be more aware, more attuned, to evolving social attitudes. They have to more honestly and openly face up to their responsibilities when crises emerge. No longer can damage control be the default position. Spin is out – or it should be.

McGuire was a great president for 10 years. He does have a powerful legacy and future generations will thank him for that. But like so many agents of change, he did his best work early, and in the end he failed to identify his use-by date.

- *Barrie Cassidy is a veteran journalist, a former host of Insiders and a longtime Collingwood supporter.*