

## Zebras winger who went on to play for Ireland

Contributed by John Walsh  
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Former Workington Zebras winger, Ronald (Ron) McCarten who went on to play for Ireland, has died at the age of 85. Born in Workington and educated at the town's Grammar School, Ron was one of four sporting brothers – Ralph, John and Gerard were the others – of which he was the third oldest. Their sporting exploits in three spheres of sport spanned nearly four decades at local, national and international levels.

The interesting thing from Ron's point of view was that before he was picked by Ireland he had been invited for trials by England and Scotland. His grandfather was Irish and his grandmother was Scottish but on both occasions he had to pull-out through injury.

The honours had started as a teenager when Ron was selected to play for Cumberland and Westmorland Schools against Northumberland and Durham in 1954 before National Service took him to Singapore.

Playing for RAF Changi he won a Services Championship in 1956 and played representative games for RAF Singapore. He picked-up a runners-up medal in the HMS Malaya Cup playing for Combined Services against Penang.

Still with the Combined Services Ron toured Japan and scored seven tries on a seven match tour before representing Malaya against Thailand.

In October 1957 Ron returned to England and he was back in rugby action with Workington, helping them win the popular Keswick Sevens. Playing for the Twin Counties he scored six tries in one game against Northern Command. He was in the Zebras side which lost the 1959 Cumberland Cup final to Egremont before moving south to play his rugby with London Irish.

In his first season with them the team played 36 matches, won 32 of them and drew another two while he also managed to fit in five Championship games for Cumberland and Westmorland.

From 1960 to 1964 he played for Middlesex in the County Championship and had to miss-out on an England trial through injury.

In that same season of 1960/61 Ron also played for Ulster against the South Africans and caught the eye of the Irish selectors. He played subsequently for an Irish XV against British Combined Services and for the Rest of Ireland against Irish Universities.

Selection for Ireland duly followed, playing and winning against England but losing to Wales and France. An injury kept him out of the Scotland game.

During the 1961/62 season Ron again played for Ulster and Middlesex and then captained the London Irish during the 1963/64 season as well as skippering Cumberland and Westmorland in the County Championship.

From 1964 to 1967 Ron played for Carlisle where he was teaching at the College and then for Oldham until 1971, captaining the for the last two seasons while he was teaching in the Lancashire town.

He played his last senior game for Dublin against Blackrock, living and teaching in the city at Castleknock College where he coached the first XV and put together 14 teams from 400 pupils.

Ron had been taken into hospital in September with pneumonia and where he was diagnosed with dementia.

He was discharged from hospital into a care home and had the first Covid-19 vaccination ten days before his death.

Regretfully that proved of no avail as he contracted the dreaded coronavirus and just could not fight it.

Formerly of Myrtle Manor, Seaton, he died peacefully at Elm Green Nursing Home, Castleknock, Dublin on Friday, leaving wife Edna and two sons James and Phillip. He had been pre-deceased by his daughter Elizabeth.

With the current travel restrictions in place Ron's sons James and Phillip and their families, who live in England, will not be able to attend the funeral which takes place at Castleknock College, where he taught from 1969 to 2002.

The funeral service tomorrow will be taken by the Very Reverend Fr Pascal Scallon, Head of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Ireland. Fr Pascal was a pupil at Castleknock College where Ron taught sport and history.

Those who would have liked to attend the funeral but due to current restrictions cannot, may follow the Mass on Wednesday at 11.30am by clicking on the link below [Funeral Mass of Ron McCarten 1935-2021 - YouTube](#).