

Hassa answers 'Pies' call



OLD MATES: Cousins and old teammates, Hassa and Len Mann.

Picture: Casey Groves

By Sam Murdoch

WHEN former Melbourne Football Club legend Hassa Mann was asked to help out his old ailing junior footy club, Merbein, he jumped at the chance.

Also enjoying his old hometown's centenary celebrations this weekend, Hassa has donated his services as a public speaker at a lunch at the Merbein Football Club today to help raise funds to keep the club afloat.

His visit is a journey back in time to see family and old friends. "I haven't been up here since mother died in 1988," he said.

"I had no reason to come up here.

"My younger sister moved to Ballarat just after mother passed away, so this is really the first time I've come back since then.

"I look forward to catching up to a lot of old friends."

Hassa made his name as a half forward and centre player with Melbourne, captaining the team for four years, winning three club best and fairest's as well as playing in three premiership teams.

Christened Harold, the 69-year-old said it was his cousin Len who shorted the name to Hassa, which eventually became a catch-cry of thousands of footy fans.

"We grew up as brothers here in Merbein and also played together in premiership in Melbourne," Hassa said.

Len was a ruckman and the two cousins played in the Demons' 1960 premiership-winning team.

"It's good to catch up with Len, who's here now," Hassa said. "When Len left Melbourne he went down to coach Warrnambool and

he's been down there since 1963. "Being up here is a good reason to have a reunion."

Hassa, who lives in Melbourne, has maintained his association with his beloved Demons.

He said Melbourne's recent form was disappointing, but he was confident they could bounce back.

"Melbourne's going through a phase that most clubs go through during a period of time.

"They're struggling at the moment, but they've got some talented young kids coming through.

"The list is very young and very immature and they haven't got the size that the good size have, but give them two or three years and I'm sure you will see them a force again in AFL."

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