

Fruit of the grassroots

Which feeder clubs are filling AFL lists and producing the star players?

MUCH is made about an AFL draftee's tangibles: their stats, height, kicking ability, decision-making, pace, leap, agility and even mental attitude receive plenty of attention.

Often scant regard is paid to the system, or club, they come from.

The TAC Cup has long been held as the premier development system in Australia and is the main feeder competition for AFL clubs.

With 44 per cent of all draftees since 2000 coming out of the TAC Cup, the statistics back up the view, but are some clubs providing more AFL players than others?

Who does it best?

It is no surprise that the club most would nominate as the dominant force in the TAC Cup over the past decade – Calder Cannons – has had the most players drafted or rookie-listed since 2000 with 67.

That is an average of just under seven per year – a remarkable achievement by anyone's standards.

So what makes Calder such a fertile breeding ground for future AFL footballers?

Is it blessed with a wonderful region, which boasts strong footballing private schools such as Penleigh & Essendon Grammar, St Bernards and Assumption College, or simply that it is developing youngsters better than anyone else.

Cannons region development manager Len Villani believes it is a combination of things.

"There is no doubt that we benefit greatly from having a strong footballing community but we also pride ourselves on providing a great environment for the boys to come into and learn," Villani said.

"We have 10 life members at the Cannons and for a club that has only been around for 15 or so years, that is a big number and says a lot.

"It demonstrates the high standard of individuals that we have been able to attract to the club and hold onto over the years.

"The likes of Robert Hyde and David Flood have moved on to AFL clubs and now Marty Allison has coached two premierships in two years and looks like he will head down the same path.

"We are extremely lucky to have had some many quality people and I feel that is a huge factor in why we have had so much success at being able to

develop players and see so many of them move on to AFL lists."

While the Cannons can lay claim to having the most number of kids move into the AFL system, there is a surprise when it comes to the average number of games played by draftees.

You might expect the Cannons to again lead the list, or one of the other league powers in

careers since 2000, the Pioneers have produced a remarkable number of players who have enjoyed long careers.

Over a quarter of all Pioneers draftees since 2000 have gone on to play 100 or more AFL games, while only six have failed to debut.

This equates to an average of 54 games per draftee. Outstanding!

Pioneers region manager Ray Byrne feels that being a country club and requiring kids to commit to training and travel from an early age stands them in good stead when they make the top level.

"The Swan Hill to Bendigo trip is a solid, boring two hours each way so do that twice a week, once for training and once to play, is a fantastic effort and to keep it up for 26 weeks is sensational," Byrne said.

"It's another discipline that they have got that perhaps prepares them for the rigours of life at the top level a touch better than those who come from the city.

"We have been lucky to have had quite a few high-quality players over the past eight or so years, which has been really good, but the thing with a lot of the country clubs is that the kids have a great deal of 'upside'.

"They don't get to do quite as much of the preparation as the city boys do, due to travel and the like."

While the Pioneers boast the TAC Cup's best average in terms of games played per draftee, they are a distant second behind Australia's best feeder club.

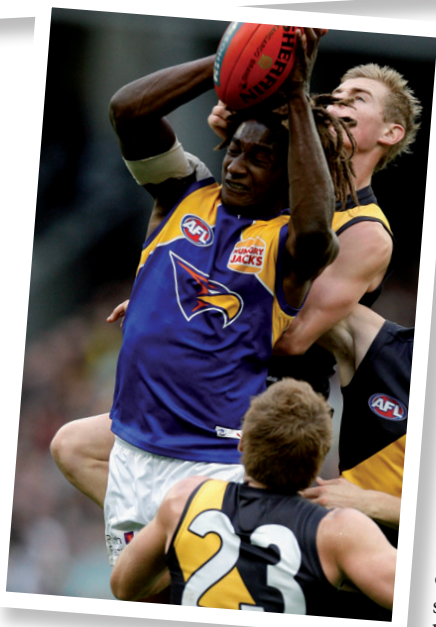
South Australia's most successful and famous club, Port Adelaide Magpies, winner of 36 premierships, heads the nationwide average of games

the Murray Bushrangers, Gippsland Power or Geelong Falcons.

But no club in the TAC Cup has a better track record than the Bendigo Pioneers.

A regular fixture at the bottom end of the league ladder and despite only having the 24 players move onto AFL

CLOCKWISE (from right): Lewis Jetta, Ryan Griffen, Nic Naitanui and Alan Didak.



Shaun Burgoyne, Scott Thompson and Graham Johncock are just a few of the names Port has produced since the turn of the millennium.

Behind Port sits West Adelaide, a club devoid of onfield success since the 1980s, but the Bloods have proven to be quite the feeder for AFL clubs with 31 players drafted since 2000 and an average of 40 games played.

The VFL has proven to be fertile territory of late.

Some 74 players have made their way from the VFL to AFL lists in the past 10 years with Melbourne's Aaron Davey, Werribee's Michael Barlow and James Podsiadly the highest profile graduates.

At the other end of the spectrum are the clubs that have struggled to produce in both quantity and quality.

The Western Jets are in a difficult zoning area, surrounded by strong areas such as Calder, Geelong and North Ballarat.

They have managed to provide only 17 players since 2000 with seven of those failing to register a single game at the top level and new Sun Michael Rischitelli the only former Jet to pass the 100-game mark.

In SA, South Adelaide ranks as the lowest among SANFL clubs.

The Panthers have had their struggles on and off the field over the same period and can boast only one player to have played 100 AFL

played per draftee.

Despite having only 16 players selected by AFL clubs since 2000, the Magpies' record is astounding.

A quarter of their draftees (four) in that period have gone on to play 150 league games, which is equal to Calder despite having 51 fewer players drafted than the Cannons.

The Port Adelaide region has always been one of Australia's most fertile football breeding grounds and while quantity of draftees from the region over the past decade hasn't been what it once was, the quality cannot be questioned.

Players such as Alan Didak,

games – Western Bulldog Ryan Griffen.

Over in the west, it is surprisingly Subiaco that has produced a mere 11 draftees in the decade despite being strong on-field with four premierships in that time.

Not a single Lion has played 100 or more AFL games.

Reigning premier Swan Districts has also not fared well with its draftees averaging just 14 AFL games.

Surely Nic Naitanui, Chris Yarran and Lewis Jetta will bump up that number!

Developing markets are a big area of concentration for the AFL.

The hours and money put into developing football in the northern states is starting to pay off with 71 kids drafted out of Queensland and 40 from NSW/ACT.

The QAFL in fact has had more 50-100 game AFL players than any another state association or development club in Australia, with 12.

So when running your eye over your new batch of recruits, after you look to see how big and strong, skilful and athletic they are, have a glance at which club they come from.

You may get a good guide as to their chances of success.



FEEDER CLUB DRAFTEES 2000-2010

TAC Cup	No. drafted	Ave games	0	50	100	150	200+
Bendigo Pioneers	24	53.9	6	2	6	1	0
Calder Cannons	67	25.6	28	8	2	4	0
Dandenong Stingrays	47	25.9	22	4	3	2	0
Eastern Ranges	44	24.5	18	2	7	0	0
Geelong Falcons	58	28.9	28	5	3	3	0
Gippsland Power	40	37.9	15	8	5	1	0
Murray Bushrangers	55	36.7	19	6	5	3	0
North Ballarat Rebels	40	36.2	10	5	4	2	0
Northern Knights	32	27.8	14	3	3	0	0
Oakleigh Chargers	48	26.7	22	4	3	2	0
Sandringham Dragons	49	28.4	20	7	2	2	0
Western Jets	17	19.0	7	1	1	0	0

WAFL	No. drafted	Ave games	0	50	100	150	200+
Claremont	40	26.3	15	5	2	1	0
East Fremantle	36	45.8	10	8	2	3	0
East Perth	15	17.5	5	1	0	0	0
Peel Thunder	20	25.9	7	1	2	0	0
Perth	18	32.9	5	5	1	0	0
South Fremantle	23	41.4	3	3	3	1	0
Subiaco	11	24.7	3	2	0	0	0
Swan Districts	21	14.9	4	0	0	0	0
West Perth	17	42.2	2	5	2	1	0

SANFL	No. drafted	Ave games	0	50	100	150	200+
Central District	20	27.0	5	6	0	0	0
Glenelg	24	34.1	10	2	2	0	1
North Adelaide	24	24.3	13	5	1	0	0
Norwood	24	18.2	12	2	1	0	0
Port Adelaide Magpies	16	67.1	5	2	1	4	0
South Adelaide	9	20.4	4	1	1	0	0
Sturt	17	36.9	7	0	2	2	0
West Adelaide	31	39.8	12	4	4	1	0
Woodville-West Torrens	22	34.5	10	5	1	1	0

State Leagues	No. drafted	Ave games	0	50	100	150	200+
VFL	74	32.7	28	7	8	2	0
AFL Tasmania	36	17.1	16	3	2	0	0
AFLQ	71	33.1	24	12	7	1	0
NSW/ACT	40	25.2	24	3	4	1	0
AFL NT	21	34.1	6	5	3	0	0

Other	No. drafted	Ave games	0	50	100	150	200+
International	21	8.0	15	1	0	0	0
Metro/Country	20	21.4	8	2	1	0	0



TOP: Max Papley marks on the lead. BELOW: Lindsay Fox grabs the ball.

Now screening: the golden days of suburban football

DARYL Pitman loves his grass-roots football.

His Channel 31 program The Local Footy Show has built a strong and regular following in recent years and one of the most popular segments has been the “Golden Days” segment featuring film and video footage from days gone by.

The breadth of film history out there in suburbia has constantly surprised Daryl.

He and his team have even come across home movie footage of a Rosebud game on the Mornington Peninsula in the early 1930s.

When we met Daryl at his office he played a DVD of Brighton’s campaign in the 1948 VFA finals series.

Prominent in the gaze of the camera was former St Kilda star Col Williamson, the playing coach of Brighton who guided the bayside club to that year’s flag.

Williamson had a couple of fellow former Saints alongside him in Arthur Rose and Alan Stretton.

Stretton later became known as a famous general whose work as head of the Darwin Reconstruction Authority was a crucial part of Australian history.

One of the most popular episodes shown in the Golden Days segment was the video of the 1963 VFA Grand Final clash between Moorabbin and Sandringham.

The 47-year-old video was in excellent condition and featured ABC commentators Roy Wright and Graham Cope.

Daryl Pitman and his crew spoke with former Moorabbin pair Max Papley and Lindsay Fox, and Sandringham’s Keith Burns, and their comments were woven into highlights of the match.

Papley, the Moorabbin premiership captain, gave an enlightening look at the demise of Moorabbin after that game.

He tells of plans to upgrade the Moorabbin Oval and enable St Kilda to play VFL games



there on Saturdays, with Moorabbin having use of it for VFA matches on Sundays.

He said that the VFL hierarchy torpedoed Moorabbin for having colluded with a VFL club, but believes that the hidden agenda was driven by a fear among VFA clubs that Moorabbin was getting too strong, on and off the field.

Papley and Fox spoke affectionately of their time at the club, which of course ended on that 1963 afternoon of triumph.

The video sparked great memories. One of several people to drop into Pitman’s office after its airing was the field umpire Alan O’Neill. He was umpiring only his 21st VFA game on that day, which was an accomplishment in itself.

Daryl Pitman takes pride in recreating great memories.

As Lindsay Fox remarked during his interview, Pitman and his team deserve appreciation from the football world for what they are doing.

■ If you have old footage of suburban football, contact Daryl Pitman on 9547 0509. The Local Footy Show screens on Channel 31 Melbourne at 7pm on Fridays and 9am Saturdays.