

## ***FORT BOYS ENJOYING THE FALCONS CHALLENGE***

By Brad Green, 26 July 2012

GEELONG Falcons ruckman Darcy Fort was given a baptism of fire ahead of his TAC Cup debut this season.

Fort – who turns 19 in a fortnight – started the year playing senior footy for his GFL club South Barwon where his first opponent was none other than retired Geelong triple premiership ruckman Brad Ottens.

Two weeks later, the 203cm Fort came up against another former AFL bigman in Peter Street.

However Fort held his own against both experienced ruckmen that gave him the confidence to know he could handle the step up into the elite competition.

“Obviously he (Ottens) uses his body really well and pushes forward and he’s a good mark so I tried to take as much of that into my game as I could,” Fort said.

“You learn how to play against blokes of that size and how to jump against them rather than (being) body-on-body and I’ve been able to take that experience into TAC Cup level.”

Fort was promoted to the Falcons side mid-way through the season and he’s been named in their best five times in six appearances, averaging just under 27 hit-outs a match.

Fort spent last year training with the Falcons as a development player and, after winning the Swans’ under-18 best and fairest, was invited back to Highton Reserve this season as one their five listed 19-year-olds.



**Photos: Courtesy of Brian Bartlett Photography**

Falcons coach Andy Allthorpe said Fort's rapid improvement has seen him quickly become the side's No. 1 ruckman.

"He's grown as a player the whole time, from the early trial games with us and going back and playing at South Barwon," Allthorpe said.

"They're a pretty supportive club who've got right behind him and helped develop his ruckwork.

"It's probably a greater advantage that he's got to ruck against men. When he's come into our system where he's rucking against similar-sized boys, it's allowed him to have a bigger influence on games.

"He's very coordinated and very good with his body. I think he can also play as a forward."

Fort is keeping his immediate focus on having a strong finish to the season with the Falcons and will worry about his national draft prospects closer to the November date.

"It's still a bit of a shock to me playing TAC Cup footy, let alone thinking about what might happen later in the year, because I'm still used to playing local footy with all my mates," Fort said.

"I've definitely learned a lot and I can see how much I've improved since I was here last year."

Allthorpe said Fort was always working on bulking up his slightly-built frame.

"He's only really been introduced to gym programs this year and he's worked really diligently at that," Allthorpe said.

Fort is also sharing his TAC cup experience with younger brother Fraser, a 197cm key defender who is still eligible to play with the Falcons next year.

Grovedale pair Luke and Cameron Delaney are the only brother combination to be drafted from the Falcons in the club's history – ironically both to North Melbourne.

Despite their age differences - Fraser turns 17 in October – Allthorpe said the pair are very close. Darcy said there's always friendly banter between the pair at home about what contribution each played to the team each week.

"The boys always joke that they have to try and separate them because they're always kicking the ball together and doing drills together but I think that's helped them," Allthorpe said.

"They've both pushed each other to get better. Both have got their own attributes that have helped them become good players in our side.

"They've had to work the hard way to get respect off the boys but now they're two of the most respected players that we've got in our side."

Fraser has missed a few games this season with a hand and ankle injury, but Allthorpe said, like his older brother, there's a lot of upside to his game.

"He's been thrown a challenge this year playing as a key back," Allthorpe said.

"He's played on some fantastic players and he's been able to handle it so I'm sure once we get him down to do a second preseason he'll get even fitter and stronger and become a better player again next year."