

ONE of the skills needed to be a top level footballer is an awareness of what's happening around you.

Think of how silky smooth moving the likes of Nick Dal Santo, Scott Pendlebury, Simon Black and Gary Ablett are out on the field every time they've got the ball in their hands.

All have a natural ability to somehow find space in the tightest of situations - but imagine how tough playing the game would be if you had a hearing problem.

That's what Geelong Falcons youngster Alex Hickey has had to deal with from the first time he kicked the ball.

Hickey only has 50 per cent hearing capacity in both ears but it hasn't stopped him chasing his dream of one day playing in the AFL.



Alex Hickey (#9) in action last Saturday vs Murray

The 17-year-old has become a key part of the Falcons side through his creative play across half-back as they look to extend their TAC Cup season by another week when they take on the Sandringham Dragons in Sunday's knock out semi-final at Carlton's Princes Park.

Having missed six weeks earlier in the season because of an ankle injury, Hickey has been named in the Falcons' best five times in his 11 appearances.

Hickey said he's never allowed his hearing ailment to hold him back from when he started playing juniors with Geelong Amateurs.

He used to wear both his hearing aids under a helmet when he first started playing competitive footy, but found that was too hard because of the sweat factor.

"I've got enough (hearing) just to get me around," Hickey said.

"My teammates are the ones who help me out the most. It's pretty rare that I'll miss a whistle, but sometimes I'll miss an umpire calling me back off the mark but the players all around me know what's going on and they just give me a quick message.

"In all my junior years the team manager would let the umpires know that I do have a hearing problem but it comes down to myself as well, just being aware that an umpire may call me back a couple of metres on the mark so I usually look to see where they are and what they're doing.

"But there's never been any real issues. I've always loved footy and everyone can see that I enjoy my footy so there's nothing holding me back as far as I'm concerned."

Hickey still has another year at TAC Cup level before he becomes eligible to be drafted, but he's already highly regarded by everyone involved with the Falcons program.

Coach Andy Allthorpe said Hickey has displayed tremendous leadership qualities and is one of the most well-liked players on their list. The Year 12 student is school captain at St Joseph's College.

“The No.1 thing with Alex is that he's a fantastic young guy,” Allthorpe said.

“Whenever people ask you about kids in the program every second person is always asking about Alex Hickey. He's left that much of a positive impression on people, that they all want to know how he's going and hope he's doing well.”

The Falcons lost their only clash against the Dragons this year, by 22 points at Werribee back in early May.

Having defied their ladder finish to topple the highly-fancied Murray in last weekend's elimination final, Hickey said the Falcons we're confident their leg speed could cause similar problems to the Dragons and advance to a preliminary final.

“There's a big sense of hope that we can pretty much knock off any side in the competition,” Hickey said.

“Our leg speed is going to be a key. They've got the bigger and older bodies, if it's a close contest then it's probably going to work in their favour a bit more.

“But if we can really spread them open and keep the ball out wide and have everyone running into space, we'll be able to split the game open and we're confident we can get the job done.”

Brad Green