

FOUR of the Geelong Falcons best AFL draft hopefuls have spent a week gaining an early insight into what it takes to reach the elite level.

As part of their AIS-AFL Academy experience, Falcons quartet James Tsitas, Darcy Gardiner, Lewis Taylor and Nic Bourke have joined in the pre-season training with an AFL club – an experience that will help with their development.

Tsitas and Gardiner have spent the week at Simonds Stadium mixing it alongside the Geelong stars.

Taylor and Bourke both headed to Melbourne, training within a couple of good torpedo punt kicks of each other.

Bourke was at Punt Road with Richmond while Taylor was across Swan Street at the AAMI Park precinct with Melbourne.

No doubt former Falcons coach and now Melbourne assistant Aaron Greaves would have been keeping a close eye on the Falcons goalkicking rover, who had been touted as a possible candidate in last October's GWS 17-year-old mini-draft.

While the AFL draft is still 10 months away, the week is an early opportunity for the Falcons' quartet to make an early impression on clubs.

They get the chance to take part in training drills while the clubs use the opportunity to get to know the potential draftees better as footballers and also as people off the training track.

To prove just how crucial it is to make a good first impression, Jake Stringer spent the week training at the Western Bulldogs during his AIS-AFL Academy stint last January.

Ten months later, the Dogs snapped up the power forward with pick No.5 in the national draft.

Tsitas, Gardiner, Bourke and Taylor will miss the Falcons' first three games of the TAC Cup season when they take part in the Academy's tour of Europe between March 27 and April 14

Highly-rated Falcons key forward Hugh Goddard has been chosen in the Academy level one squad that will be coached by former Fitzroy and Brisbane Lions champion Chris Johnson and is set to tour New Zealand this month.

Meanwhile, the Falcons' Geelong and Hampden squads resume pre-season training in Camperdown and at Highton Reserve next Monday evening (January 21) after a month's break.

The 2013 squad will start to take shape after two trial matches at Camperdown's Leura Oval on February 24 and March 3.

Brad Green