

# Galaxy leads united front for NPL team

MICHAEL AUCIELLO

GEELONG'S soccer clubs will put rivalries aside to unite for a combined bid for a team in the new National Premier League.

The Greater Geelong Galaxy yesterday announced it had put in an expression of interest to join the NPL, scheduled to start next year.

It will spend the next two months working with clubs across the region, putting together a formal bid by July 31.

Only Surf Coast Football Club is not on board, deciding to put in its own bid. Only one local club is expected to get the nod when licences are announced in September.

Galaxy chairman Joe Madunic yesterday said the move hoped to provide a locally based pathway for Geelong region kids.

"I think we owe it to our kids more than anything, because if we don't do it for the kids and the 14 to 17-year-olds coming through, they'll just go where the talent pool takes them. And that's unfortunately the reality of today," Madunic said.

"They'll find an NPL club in Melbourne and, from that perspective, Geelong will always be drained of players.

"The landscape is changing and if Geelong doesn't get a bid, Football Federation Victoria will re-draw the boundaries and the NPL clubs that Geelong will possibly be affiliated with will be Ballarat or Werribee or something in the western suburbs.

"So at the end of the day we've put in a bid basically to try to keep our kids playing in Geelong."

A Geelong senior team in the NPL would pool the best local talent into a representative team.

Madunic said the club would be initially branded

as the Galaxy, until an AGM was held where members could elect to change the name, colours, board or anything else.

FFV Geelong region chairman Jack Karpinski said a united bid was the best way for the region to go forward.

"This will have some severe ramifications for a number of clubs because talented players have always gravitated to any club that will offer them a pathway," Karpinski said.

"But this is an opportunity for the whole region to work together and set up one club to present that particular pathway.

"All clubs will be contributing their best players to a representative pool but it's not about the clubs.

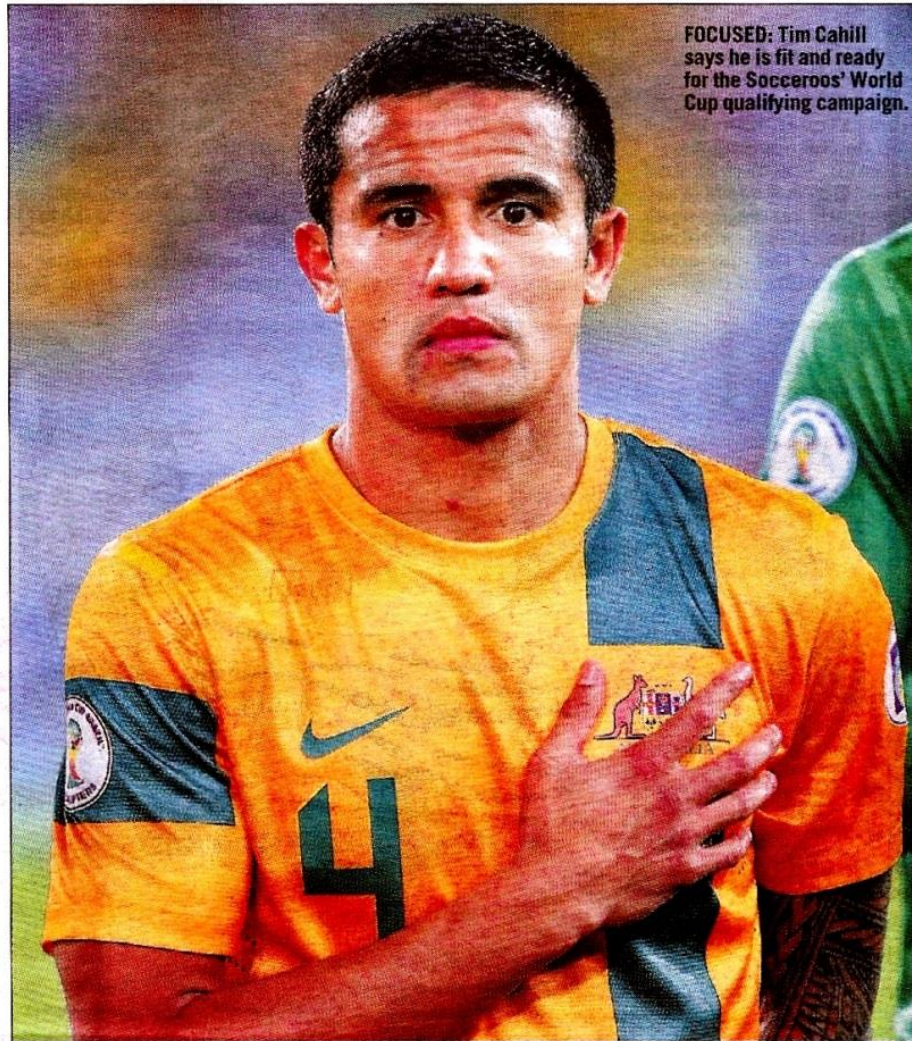
"Most of the clubs understand it's not about them, it's about the individual youth who's got a talent, and his best way to move forward would be to play at a representative level all year against the other best kids, with the best coaching."

But while the NPL is being set up to act as a second tier to the A-League, Karpinski said it would not be necessarily Geelong's best chance of fielding a team at the elite level.

"All the FFV and Football Federation Australia are saying is this is going to be the most likely avenue that any club is going to have of becoming an A-League club," he said.

"But the financial stepping stones between the second tier and the first tier, if you want to call it A- and B-League for example, is so vast that you would expect it'd be a number of years before we are able to even consider that.

"The more likely scenario is that somebody with a lot of money is going to move (an existing A-League) club to Geelong."



FOCUSED: Tim Cahill says he is fit and ready for the Socceroos' World Cup qualifying campaign.

## Cahill gears up for Japan clash

TIM Cahill has declared he is fit, focused and ready to help the Socceroos through their most critical fortnight of football since the 2006 World Cup qualifying campaign.

With hopes of direct World Cup qualification on a knife's edge, next week's away showdown with group leader Japan is followed by home matches against Jor-

dan and Iraq. One slip-up could mean the Socceroos either miss qualification altogether or face a circuitous route to qualify through further playoffs against several Asian and South American opponents.

Cahill, who is in superb goal-scoring touch for his American club the New York Red Bulls, looms yet

again as the Socceroos' best hope of gaining the results required to make a third successive World Cup finals.

"It's critical," Cahill said when asked about the next three matches.

"I don't want to speculate about the end (result) just want to focus on Japan and be really focused on the job at hand."