

## ***Geelong Falcons: 2013 National Draft Preview***

THE Geelong Falcons appear set to regain its reputation for producing top end AFL talent in the 2013 NAB AFL national draft.

Between 2004 and 2011 the Falcons had at least one player chosen by AFL clubs in the first round of the national draft.

Some of these names included Jordan Lewis (2004), Shaun Higgins (2005), Travis Boak, (2006), Patrick Dangerfield (2007), Gary Rohan (2009), Billie Smedts (2010) and Taylor Adams (2011).

In the 2001 national draft, the Falcons produced the No. 1 pick in Hawthorn premiership captain Luke Hodge while the No. 8 pick was 2007 Brownlow medallist and three-time Geelong premiership hero Jimmy Bartel.

Heading into Thursday night's draft on the Gold Coast, goalkicking midfielder Lewis Taylor is almost certain to be snapped up in the first round with key defender Darcy Gardiner rated highly by a lot of AFL recruiters.

Despite breaking his leg mid-way through the season while playing for Vic Country in the AFL under-18 national championships, midfielder Darcy Lang is another Falcon that could be snapped up in either the draft's second or third round.

Lang also turns 18 years old on the day the draft is held, November 21.

But Falcons regional manager Michael Turner said places on an AFL list in 2014 is very scarce and harbours hopes that several of their squad can find new homes via the rookie draft.

"There's only 55 live picks in the draft for the whole of Australia and there's only going to be probably 30 to 40 rookie picks. So it's getting harder to get drafted," Turner said.

"But, as I always say to our players every year, it doesn't matter if you get drafted or rookie listed - as long as you get your opportunity.

"There's a lot of good players out there so I think if we get three (drafted) out of the 55 in Taylor, Gardiner and Lang, that's a good effort. If we could sneak in another one (draftee) then that would be fantastic.

"But some of them are going to have to wait for the rookie draft and some kids will miss out.

"I think our draft crop next year is potentially better. We've got some really good kids coming through."

Co-captains Alex Hickey – the Falcons best and fairest winner – and James Tsitas, Nick Bourke, Aaron Christensen, Meyrick Buchanan, Sam Russell and Fraser Fort are among the Falcons other leading draft hopefuls.

Turner believes that crop's best chance is via the rookie draft, being held on November 27.

Should they not be selected, Turner said Dixon, Russell and Doug Bond have all been invited back to play with the Falcons as 19-year-olds in the TAC Cup next season.

Last year, forward Mason Wood (North Melbourne) and pacey midfielder Josh Saunders (St Kilda) were the players drafted from the Falcons at picks No. 41 and 43 respectively.

“I think the only KPI that you can compare clubs to clubs these days is by how many of their players are on AFL lists,” Turner said.

“So, after this draft, we'll probably have 50 players on AFL lists - which is the most of anyone in Australia by a long way.

“It's been a very successful program and, when we look at the star players on our honour boards, we're very, very proud of them and what they've gone on to achieve.”

*Brad Green*