

# JAME5HIRD

## A C A D E M Y

### WELCOME MESSAGE

**Hello and welcome to the second edition of the James Hird Academy Newsletter for 2013.**

It's an incredibly exciting time to be part of the red and black family! The Bombers have consolidated a barnstorming start to the season and currently sit 5th on the AFL Ladder with four home and away games remaining.

2013 is shaping up as a watershed year for Michael Hibberd and Jake Carlisle, with the dashing defender and rangy swing-man both providing glimpses of All-Australian form. Jobe Watson – so often a barometer of the team's performance – was in blistering early touch that seemingly had the skipper well-placed to win back-to-back Brownlow Medals, before a broken collar bone temporarily stalled his stellar season. Watson's injury setback has paved the way for emerging stars like Dyson Heppell, Jake Melksham and David Zaharakis to take the next step in their development.

Meanwhile, the early rounds of the VFL competition set the scene for Joe Daniher to make a strong case for senior selection. Joe's much-

anticipated AFL debut came to fruition in blockbuster fashion, with the rookie forward running out for his first senior game in Essendon's electrifying Round 11 win against Carlton. Proof of the Academy Graduate's prodigious talent was made plain for the football world to see the following week, when a 3-goal first half dismantled the Suns' hopes of rising into the top eight.

The Round 12 clash against Gold Coast at Etihad Stadium also bore witness to the James Hird Academy's annual Guard of Honour Game, where the Essendon Football Club's future crop of potential Father/Son draftees was proudly on display.

Don't forget, you can stay up to date with all the latest news from the James Hird Academy by visiting the following address: [www.essendonfc.com.au/team/james-hird-academy](http://www.essendonfc.com.au/team/james-hird-academy)

Good luck to all Academy Members with their continuing football commitments.

Go Bombers!



### WORD FROM HIRD

**Warm greetings to all Academy Members, I hope each and every one of you is thoroughly enjoying your football so far this year.**

As most of you closely follow the progress of the senior team, I'd like to once again underscore how proud I am of our playing group. To be sitting just outside the top four amid trying circumstances is testament to the boys' resilience, determination and dedication on the training track.

Our renewed sense of team unity and spirit forged in the face of adversity should hold us in good stead for the remainder of the season, as we look to further improve our ladder position and prepare to launch a fierce finals campaign.

I would like to extend my personal congratulations to those of you who have earned representative squad selection – well done and keep up the good work.

Thanks also to all Academy Members who participated in the Guard of Honour prior to our Round 12 clash against Gold Coast; it was a great show of support that was keenly felt by all involved at the club.

I wish all of you the best of luck for the rest of the season.

Remember to always have fun out on the field and go Bombers!

#### JAMES HIRD ACADEMY - SCHOLARSHIP HOLDERS

PLAYER	AGE	SCHOLARSHIP
Jedd Clothier	18	NSW Scholarship

#### JAMES HIRD ACADEMY - FATHER/SONS

PLAYER	AGE	FATHER
Daniel Thompson	19	Mark Thompson
Jydon Neagle	18	Merv Neagle
Callum Daniher	17	Chris Daniher
Todd Vander Haar	17	Paul Vander Haar
Jake Long	17	Michael Long
Nathan Neagle	16	Merv Neagle
Tom Wallis	16	Dean Wallis
Jett Bewick	15	Darren Bewick
Harvey Daniher	15	Chris Daniher
Matthew Neagle	15	Merv Neagle

#### JAMES HIRD ACADEMY - BABY BOMBERS

PLAYER	AGE	FATHER
Jaxon Neagle	13	Merv Neagle
Mason Fletcher	13	Dustin Fletcher
Ricky O'Donnell	12	Gary O'Donnell
Darcy Denham	12	Sean Denham
Kurtis Barnard	12	Paul Barnard
Tom Hird	12	James Hird
Max Fletcher	10	Dustin Fletcher
Joshua Misiti	10	Joe Misiti
Nyawi Lovett-Murray	10	Nathan Lovett-Murray
Alex Hird	10	James Hird
Tex Wanganeen	9	Gavin Wanganeen
Luca Alessio	8	Steve Alessio
Will Hamilton	8	Paul Hamilton
Luke Barnard	8	Paul Barnard
Noah Caracella	7	Blake Caracella
Alex Alessio	6	Steve Alessio
Mara Lovett-Murray	5	Nathan Lovett-Murray
Logan Daniher	5	Chris Daniher
Aidan Ramanauskas	4	Adam Ramanauskas
William Hird	4	James Hird
Koby Bewick	4	Darren Bewick
Max Alessio	4	Steve Alessio
Thomas Caracella	3	Blake Caracella
Lucas Ramanauskas	2	Adam Ramanauskas
Rylan Johnson	2	Mark Johnson
Noah Peverill	1	Damien Peverill
Lenny Solomon	1	Dean Solomon
Jacob Lloyd	1	Matthew LLoyd

## ACADEMY REVIEW: 2013 GUARD OF HONOUR GAME

**Following on from the overwhelming success of last year's signature James Hird Academy event, our third annual Guard of Honour Game proved to be another fantastic night for all involved.**

As the flagship occasion on the Academy calendar, the Guard of Honour Game is a physical gathering of the Essendon Football Club's past, present and future.

The evening witnessed the return of many former greats to have worn the red sash; including premiership stars like Darren Bewick, Paul Barnard, 'Smokin' Joe Misiti, Mark Johnson and Adam Ramanaukas along with their young families.

The Victory Room at Etihad Stadium served as a makeshift playground for a bright-eyed fleet of Baby Bombers prior to Essendon's clash with the Gold Coast Suns. A pair of little Ramas chased two blonde bombshell Barnard boys around the tables, while a trio of Hird's reappropriated a set of barstools as goalposts and practiced their sharpshooting skills with a mini-footy.

Interim CEO, Ray Gunston, dropped by the Victory Room to impart some words of wisdom to the rapt audience; while Anthony Daniher delivered a stirring speech, recounting how much the enduring Father/Son connection with the Essendon Football Club means

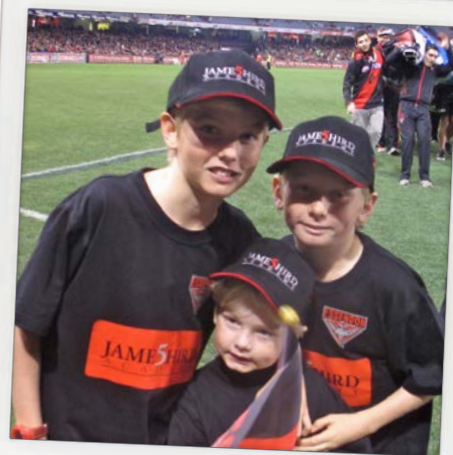
to the entire Daniher clan. The proud dad couldn't speak highly enough of the Academy's role in preparing his youngest son, Joe, for life as an AFL footballer and emphasised his unwavering support for the junior program.

Once canapés and beverages had been served, the eager bunch of Academy Members weaved their way through the bowels of Etihad Stadium, wandered up the players' race and spilled out onto the imposing playing arena. As their little feet touched upon the hallowed turf, the junior brigade cast their eyes across stands packed with more than 30,000 cheering spectators.

The Baby Bombers took their places in front of the cheer squad banner and formed a runway for the modern-day Essendon heroes to take the field. The potential stars of tomorrow applauded and waved flags in salute to the current custodians to don the red and black jumper.

The display of support from their young cohorts served as tangible inspiration for the senior Bombers, who ran out comprehensive winners and eclipsed the Suns by 43 points.

The Academy would like to thank the parents and children who took part in this season's event and we look forward to seeing all of you once again at next year's Guard of Honour Game!



*James, Will and Alex Hird*



*Aidan and Lucas Ramanaukas*



## SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

The James Hird Academy wishes to announce the availability of major and individual player sponsorship opportunities for season 2013. This is a fantastic opportunity to promote your product, service or corporation in conjunction with the Academy. If you are interested in entering a sponsorship agreement, please contact Chris Goodwin on 0434 182 351 or [cgoodwin@essendonfc.com.au](mailto:cgoodwin@essendonfc.com.au) for more information.



## ACADEMY ACHIEVEMENTS

The JHA would like to congratulate the following Academy Members on their success so far this season:



**Jydon Neagle** – Predominantly playing as a medium-sized forward, Jydon averaged 12 disposals and kicked 10 goals across 5 impressive games for NSW/ACT in the NAB AFL Under 18 National Championships.



**Jedd Clothier** – Also pulling on the boots for the NSW/ACT Under 18 team at the National Champs, Jedd performed well in each of his 5 games. Working hard through the midfield, Jedd racked up an average of 16 disposals and slotted 2 goals throughout the highly competitive campaign.



**Jake Long** – Unfortunately, a broken collarbone kept Jake on the sidelines for the duration of the National Championships but the Academy congratulates the skilful youngster on earning representative selection for the Northern Territory at Under 18 level.



**Harvey Daniher** – Lining up as a medium-sized defender, Harvey competed encouragingly in 3 games for the NSW/ACT Under 16 side and averaged 11 disposals.



**Tom Wallis** – Another Academy young-gun to miss the National Championships through unfortunate circumstances, Tom was selected to play for VIC Metro in the Under16 category prior to contracting glandular fever. The JHA congratulates Tom on his well-earned state selection and wishes him all the very best in his recovery.

## JHA STAFF UPDATE

The James Hird Academy would like to extend a warm welcome to our two newest members of staff, **Des O'Sullivan** in the role of JHA Fitness Coordinator and **Zoe Cotsis** in the role of JHA Media Liaison.

Des also works in the roles of AFL Performance Analyst and VFL Strength and Conditioning Coach, while having also recently completed his Master's Degree in Exercise Science (Strength and Conditioning).

Zoe is a life-long Bomber fan and Media Studies Graduate (majoring in Journalism and Media Communications) who is currently serving as a volunteer with the JHA. Zoe also works as an associate producer with a boutique television production house and is the host of Antler's Out of the Bag series on BomberTV.

Des and Zoe look forward to applying their respective skills to the benefit of the JHA and Essendon Football Club.

Be sure to stay tuned for more exciting staff announcements in the near future!

## JHA 2013 EVENTS CALENDAR

JHA Camp	23 - 24 September
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## MERV NEAGLE TRIBUTE DINNER AND FAMILY FUNDRAISER



Time is running out to book your place at the Merv Neagle Tribute Dinner & Family Fundraiser. Guaranteed to be an unforgettable evening, the event will see the return of many former Bomber stars and provide an opportunity for fans to secure unique pieces of exclusive memorabilia. A cavalcade of famous football identities will also be in attendance to honour one of the truly great characters of our game. Purchase your ticket by visiting the following website: [essendoncorporatehospitality.com.au/signature-events/merv-neagle-tribute-dinner/](http://essendoncorporatehospitality.com.au/signature-events/merv-neagle-tribute-dinner/)

**Date:** Thursday 22 August, 2013

**Venue:** Grand Hyatt on Collins Street, Melbourne

**Time:** 6.30pm for 7.00pm start

**Price:** Premium ticket \$325 (includes being hosted by a famous football identity in premium seating and an exclusive memorabilia piece).

Standard ticket \$195

# BABY BOMBER RETURNS TO THE FOLD

by Zoe Cotsis

**Just over 22 years ago during the pre-season of 1991, a skinny Indigenous kid left his close-knit family back in Adelaide and walked through the doors of the Essendon Football Club, not knowing he would also be walking into the history books.**

That raw but naturally gifted teenager would go on to carve out one of the most celebrated football careers of all time.

But Gavin Wanganeen was not merely a footballer – he was an entertainer, with the MCG serving as his grandest stage. Every weekend he would awe audiences in their thousands; most happy to pay the admission fee just to watch ‘The Rubber Man’ dance with the football, zip around would-be tacklers and pull down seemingly impossible marks. The dashing defender was brave and brilliant, famous for fearlessly launching himself into packs with utter disregard for his personal safety.

After making the move to Melbourne and arriving at Windy Hill as a 17-year-old, Wanganeen spent most of his formative years growing up amid the environment of an AFL club, an experience that was both daunting and rewarding.

Gavin remembers, “I rocked up here as a teenage boy and grew into a young man very quickly. I have really fond memories of growing up here at the Essendon Football Club that I’ll never forget and they’re imprinted in my mind. Every time I come back to the club or I’m in Melbourne, those memories just flood back. I’m really proud of the time that I spent here and I’m glad that I left Adelaide at age 17 to spend six wonderful years at one of the greatest clubs in the world.”

Wanganeen didn’t have to wait long to savour the ultimate success at AFL level, with the elusive back-pocket marvel playing a key role in Essendon’s famous Grand Final victory over Carlton in just his third season at the club.

If anyone embodied the spirit of the all-conquering Baby Bombers of ’93, it would be Wanganeen: a fresh-faced footballing prodigy oozing with talent, charm and the irrepressible exuberance of youth. 1993 would turn out to be a watershed year for Gavin; a season that saw him take home

the Brownlow Medal, earn the first of five All Australian honours and become a Premiership player... all at the tender age of 20.

The AFL Hall of Fame inductee recounts those halcyon days with his customary cheeky grin, “It was a fairly amazing year but for me I was a pretty laidback lad, so all the hype and attention didn’t really faze me. I certainly didn’t crave the spotlight; I just sort of rolled with it. Looking back on that season now, you realise how big it was and how huge that achievement really was. I didn’t like to reflect too much on my achievements while I was still playing, it’s more so now that I’ve finished I think back and go, ‘Wow, that year was pretty incredible’”.

Wanganeen relished the chance to catch up with his former teammates and celebrate the 20th anniversary of the 1993 flag at the premiership reunion held earlier this year. The Brownlow Medallist reveals, “It was really nice to be there and hear some of the boys talk about that ’93 season. There were so many stories to share and familiar faces that brought back great memories, it felt like the Grand Final was just only yesterday.”

As Bomber fans are acutely aware, the Hollywood start to Wanganeen’s career would also be matched by a fairy-tale finish with a second Premiership victory – albeit, not in red and black.

The call of home was too strong to refuse and when Port Adelaide came courting its former junior star prior to the commencement of the 1997 season, Wanganeen made the difficult choice to return to South Australia. The decision resulted in plenty of heartache, both for distraught Essendon supporters losing a fan favourite and of course for Gavin himself.

When asked how hard it actually was to leave the Bombers after achieving such success, Wanganeen grimaces. “It’s a good question and a tough one, I get asked that lots of times and that’s just the way it is. I was only 23 years of age





at that stage so I was still quite young; really I was just a kid. You look at the 23-year-olds that are playing today – they're still raw. Having started as a 17-year-old I had already played a lot of footy for Essendon. Being an Adelaide boy and after playing junior football with Port, there were those ties that were just too deep to deny. It was definitely a difficult decision and it could've gone either way to be honest but it was just one of things that happened."

He continues, "Looking back now; in a way I feel like, 'Damn, I would've liked to have stayed'. But then look at what I achieved with Port Adelaide as well, it sort of made the move worthwhile when I played in another premiership with them".

Despite playing out the final decade of his career with the Port Adelaide Football Club, Wanganeen admits the bonds forged during his early days at Bomberland have never waned and still remain strong to this day.

"I have a great love for both clubs and I still have red and black blood running through my veins – that's a given," the 300-gamer admits with a smile. "It makes me really proud that I've played successful footy for the Bombers. This place has given me so much, it's enabled me to not only become a premiership player but also be named an AFL Hall of Famer. I was lucky enough to be given that honour by the AFL in 2010 and the Essendon Football Club helped contribute towards that achievement."

Another accolade that Wanganeen holds close to his heart is his selection in the Indigenous Team of the Century, an honour that resonates deeply with the AFL great's rich Aboriginal heritage.

"My background on my mum's side comes from the town of Ceduna in the West Coast region of South Australia, from a particular tribe out there called the Kokotha People. I've learnt a lot about her family and I have strong Indigenous links, which I'm incredibly proud of. To be connected to one of the oldest living cultures in history is an amazing feeling and to be named in the Indigenous Team of the Century is a proud achievement of mine. Guys like Michael Long and Nicky Winmar were my idols and they paved the way to make football a better game for the Indigenous players to come after them," Wanganeen acknowledges.

Since hanging up the boots in 2006, the dual premiership player has also been impressed with the steps that the AFL, as a governing body, has taken to embrace the wider Indigenous community. Wanganeen states, "They have put a lot of time, effort and money into Indigenous programs to help young Aboriginal boys get into the AFL, so they should be commended for that continued support and what they've done for the Indigenous people around Australia."

Life after football has been a busy time for Gavin, both professionally and on the home-front. Once a lightly-framed lad himself, Wanganeen's latest business venture is aiding young men and women in striving to attain their ideal body shape and fitness levels.

"When footy finished for me in 2006, I had about 12 months off and just tried to figure out what I wanted to do. I realised that I needed to keep fit after football because that was the lifestyle I had been living all my life. I just felt that the gym industry held good opportunities for me, so I enquired about it and found out that it was the perfect fit."

Wanganeen now operates a number of gymnasiums under the Anytime Fitness banner, a 24-hour gym chain that originated in the USA and has since evolved into one of the biggest fitness companies across the globe.

In addition to operating a few gyms in Adelaide, Wanganeen has recently opened a brand new outlet in the heart of Essendon and encourages local Bomber fans to stop by. "It's a great institution with friendly staff and top-quality equipment and that's what probably sets us apart from the rest. The new gym is virtually on the corner of Keilor Road and Mount Road, next to the Lincoln Hotel. It's very centrally located, so I'm looking forward to seeing some familiar faces around the area."

Family life is also keeping Wanganeen blissfully busy. Gavin tied the knot with second wife and popular TV presenter, Pippa Hanson, during July of last year. The happy couple are ready to welcome a little bundle of joy into the world in mid-September; while Gavin's daughter, Mia and son, Tex also play their part in keeping the proud dad on his toes.

Nine-year-old Tex is a keen member of the James Hird Academy, a concept that his father fully supports. "I think it's a great initiative that makes a link with the footy club through the Father/Son connection from an early age," Wanganeen says.





Gavin and Tex

“For the lads involved in the Academy, there’s a huge chance that they will go on to play AFL. It’s already in their genes, so it just makes sense to have a program that supports Father/Son recruitment and helps out the kids that are eligible under the rule. It’s important to prepare them and give them every opportunity so that when they’re ready to go to the next level, it’s easier to make that transition.”

Wanganeen is cautious when providing football tips and advice to his son, beyond emphasising to just enjoy playing sport. He reveals, “Tex really loves his footy, occasionally if I’m close enough on the boundary line and he runs by then I might yell out the odd word here or there but I just encourage him to keep kicking the footy at home. I’m always kicking the footy with him in the backyard, the more he mucks around with a football – the better he’ll get.”

While hesitant to offer his boy any football advice outside of making sure to have fun on the field, Gavin is prepared to be a guiding force if and when Tex decides to take his football seriously. “I want him to enjoy his footy firstly, so I don’t really say a heap at the moment. As he gets a little bit older, I’ll be there to offer advice when he’s about 13 or 14 and a bit more mature. I’ll certainly give him some information to take on – he’s a bit young now but he’ll have that support from me whenever he needs it.”

When prompted to impart some words of wisdom to the other young hopefuls currently taking part in the James Hird Academy, Wanganeen doesn’t have to ponder long. “I think the best tip I could pass on is to always have a footy in your hands wherever you go,” he discloses with a wry smile. “Sleep with it, get up with it; the more you have it in your hands the more it’ll feel like a second skin, so try to keep one around as often as possible.”

It is somewhat ironic that upon sitting for this interview, Wanganeen couldn’t resist the temptation of pilfering a

spare football from the corner of Essendon List Manager, Adrian Dodoro’s Windy Hill office. Even while sitting for this interview, Wanganeen practices what he preaches, constantly twirling and palming the shiny Sherrin between his hands like it’s the most natural thing in the world. For him, it probably is.

It’s also natural for a father to worry when his son is eligible to be drafted via the Father/Son selection process for both Essendon and the Port Adelaide Football Club; a situation that can be seen as both a blessing and a burden. “Obviously he’s eligible under both clubs and that’ll be a nightmare in itself when the time comes,” Gavin admits with a chuckle.

While the senior Wanganeen would be thrilled to see his boy play footy at the highest level for either team, he admits there’s an added element of romance to the thought of Tex wearing the red sash.

“In all seriousness, it would make me extremely proud if he runs out with the Bombers one day. I guess it will be a tough decision for him but if playing footy is what he wants to do then good luck to the boy and I wish him all the best. I’d be happy if he pulls on the red and black jumper, especially if he debuts as a young teenager like I did. There’d be a nice sense of history repeating itself but who knows what the future holds.”

In a few years’ time, another skinny teenage Wanganeen might just wander through the doors of the Essendon Football Club and when that day comes, no one will be prouder than his famous father who took those same steps over two decades ago.

Be sure to check out Gavin’s Anytime Fitness outlet at 23 Keilor Road in Essendon, or jump online at [anytimefitness.com.au/](http://anytimefitness.com.au/) to find out more information and get fit fast!

