

JAME⁵HIRD

A C A D E M Y

EST 2010



Welcome to a bumper edition of the James Hird Academy newsletter.

It was yet another terrific year for the JHA, with Heath Hocking once again leading the way brilliantly as the members looked to take their game to the next level, both on and off the field.

There were some new faces, too, with Essendon legend Dustin Fletcher taking up a role as an assistant coach to strengthen the squad's defensive and key-position skills.

From skill sessions to cooking classes, the members were treated to a plethora of learning experiences throughout the program as the club strived to encourage every kid to be the best they can be.

On the competitive field, there were many successes. We had premierships victories, best and fairest successes and endless memorable moments at club, school and state level as the members

thrived on the enjoyment of football.

Hocking's strong connection to the red and black ensured the assistance of many current senior Bombers throughout the year, providing the squad with invaluable insights into the lives of our AFL footballers and bringing the kids ever closer to their heroes.

The JHA's annual guard of honour game was once again among the highlights of the year, with many past and emerging stars gracing the turf at Marvel Stadium ahead of the Bombers' clash with Port Adelaide in round 20.

Sadly, the year is nearly over, but there are many exciting times ahead, so sit back, relax and enjoy reflecting on another wonderful year for the JHA.

Written by Conor Walsh and edited by Jullian Trantino and Luke Corson

From the coach



Hello to all Bombers fans,

We have had a great year in the James Hird Academy with plenty of growth and development from all members.

I really enjoyed the year helping coach and mentor the young JHA members. We worked really hard on the basics of the game, incorporating skills, decision making, contested work, strength and resistance training, fun and games.

This year we went to another level concentrating on more personal development as well as football development. The members were involved in cooking classes with Yiana (JHA dietician), mental skills sessions with David Reid (Essendon's mental skills coach) and other interactive football skill sessions with Tim Buszard (club skill acquisition advisor).

Moving on to next year, I am really excited to see how our members continue to improve and develop their football, life skills and become good young Essendon people.

I would like to thank Adam Veli (JHA strength and conditioning coach) for all his support and efforts throughout the year. I would also like to thank Georgia Harvey for all her support this year, making the program run smoothly.

Finally, to all the James Hird Academy members, thanks for your commitment to the program and helping make it a really positive year.

Heath Hocking

James Hird Academy head coach



Heath Hocking during one of this year's Baby Bombers clinics

Around The Grounds

Acceleration Group

Mason Fletcher

Father - Dustin Fletcher

The eldest son of club legend Dustin Fletcher, Mason made a successful return from the back injury that curtailed his 2018 season. He bounced back to play 14 games for the Calder Cannons this year, averaging 9.3 disposals and leading the team with an impressive haul of 16 goals. His form led to a selection in the AFL Victoria Young Guns Series, while he also had the chance to spend some time training with the senior squad at The Hangar to gain a greater insight into what it takes to be an AFL footballer.



Mason Fletcher

Mohammed Abou-Eid

NGA

Mohammed Abou-Eid certainly got his fair share of experience around the big bodies of senior football this year, becoming a regular feature in the senior side for West Coburg and impressing with seven goals from his 10 games. He added three reserve games, two for the under-19 team and was rewarded with two NAB League games with the Calder Cannons where he averaged 15 disposals.



Mohammed Abou-Eid

Tom Hird

Father - James Hird

Tom Hird got the opportunity to train with Essendon's senior team in January, where he showed his elite foot skills and endurance, looking at home at The Hangar. Tom has also been excelling at soccer, playing one game for Port Melbourne Sharks in the NPL VIC Men competition this year, along with 21 games and two goals for Port Melbourne's under-20 team.

Kyle Baker

NGA

Another exciting young Bomber to get a good taste of senior football this year was Kyle Baker, who was named in the best players on three occasions from 11 games at the top level with Maribyrnong Park. He was also able to make his mark against his own age group with six games for the Cannons, averaging 10.5 disposals.

Lachlan Johnson

NGA

The need for a knee reconstruction sadly cut Lachlan Johnson's season short, but not before the young gun impressed in five games with the Oakleigh Chargers alongside school football commitments with Scotch College. Lachlan averaged 15.2 disposals and 7.2 tackles for the Chargers in a strong display of his talent.

Jeffrey Simon

NGA

Jeffrey Simon became a regular feature of the Tiwi Bombers' senior line-up in the 2018/19 season, taking the field 12 times and booting five goals. He has impressed against the big bodies again at the start of the 2019/20 season, kicking three goals from the opening four games in an exciting display of his talent.

Xavier Saly

NGA

A strong season culminated in an exciting premiership success for Xavier Saly at Westmeadows this year. Xavier booted 15 goals and was named in the best three times from his 14 games with the under-19s to play a crucial role in the flag, where the side defeated Northern Saints by 37 points in the Grand Final.



Xavier Saly

Around The Grounds

Acceleration Group cont.



Brayden Rioli NGA

A younger brother of Richmond star Daniel, Brayden Rioli mixed his time at St Mary's in the NTFL between the senior and under-18 teams in the 2018/19 season. He played five games in the junior side and lined up seven times for the senior team, performing well to claim a rising star nomination. He has since joined the Tiwi Bombers for the 2019/20 season and has begun well, lining up on three occasions.



Brayden Rioli

Cody Brand NGA

Cody Brand put together a great season this year, lining up in 10 games for the Calder Cannons and showing his versatility in strong performances both in attack and defence. He also played a key role in PEGS' Grand Final victory over Assumption and had the exciting opportunity to take the field in the NAB AFL All Stars Futures game, which this year acted as a curtain-raiser for the AFL Grand Final.

Max Fletcher Father - Dustin Fletcher

Max, the younger brother of Mason, also had an exciting year at both club and school level. He took part in nine games for Aberfeldie in the top division of the under-19 EDFL competition, and he also played his part in Penleigh and Essendon Grammar School's premiership-winning victory over Assumption to add another flag under our JHA squad's belt.

Preyben Tipiloura NGA

This year was one of great growth for Tiwi talent Preyben Tipiloura, who recently made a successful and deserved senior debut for the Tiwi Bombers. He was one of the stars of the NTFL's under-16 ranks before that, booting 19 goals and being named in the best players in eight out of 10 games for St Mary's. He was a feature of the Tuyu Buffaloes in the Tiwi Islands Football League with two goals from nine games and also represented the Northern Territory in two under-16 championship games. He added a sensational effort for the NT in the AFL National Inclusion Carnival, kicking four goals in the Grand Final to help the side knock off Vic Metro.

Joshua Misiti Father - Joe Misiti

Josh Misiti, the son of two-time premiership hero Joe, put together another great year of football beside Max Fletcher in Aberfeldie's under-17 team. Josh was in the best six times and kicked seven goals from 14 games with the side, but sadly the boys fell short in the Grand Final against Keilor. His efforts saw him rewarded with two NAB League games with Calder, where he got a good insight into what the next level will hold for him.



Joshua Misiti

Nyawi Moore Father - Nathan Lovett-Murray

A son of former gun Bomber Nathan Lovett-Murray, Nyawi Moore gained some valuable senior experience with 12 games for Woorinen in the Central Murray Football Netball League this year. After a dominant effort in the juniors in 2018, Nywai stepped up to the top level and was named in the best players twice from his 12 games, also showing his skills with Vic Country in the under-16 championship trial games.

Alex Hird Father - James Hird

Alex Hird continued to develop his soccer talents this year, taking the field 22 times for the Port Melbourne Sharks in the NPL East Vic Boys competition at under-16 level.

Tex Wanganeen Father - Gavin Wanganeen

Tex Wanganeen, the son of club champion Gavin, put together another good year of football with Mitcham stepping up to under-16.5 level. He booted eight goals from as many games with the side and added four more matches with Sturt in the SANFL Under-16 Torrens University Cup, where he contributed a further three goals.

Jordan Burke NGA

Jordan Burke was another JHA member to ply his trade in the under-16 NTFL competition. He lined up seven times for St Mary's and claimed a spot in the best players, consistently proving dangerous in front of the big sticks with an impressive 12 goals.

Around The Grounds

Flight Squad

Carlos Egan NGA

Carlos Egan topped off another great season with Strathmore's under-15 best and fairest award. Egan booted 25 goals and claimed 10 spots among the best players in 14 games with the team that ultimately just missed out in an agonising three-point Grand Final loss to Keilor. Carlos was rewarded as a Victorian representative in the School Sport Australia 15 Years & Under Boys Australian Football Championship.



Carlos Egan

Ayui Makieng NGA

Ayui Makieng got his fair share of experience this year, mixing his regular spot at Flemington Juniors with a number of representative opportunities. Ayui was terrific for Flemington, claiming a spot in the best players in four of 11 under-16 games and earning three chances with the under-18 team where he booted a goal and was named in the best on one occasion. He also played for the 2019 World Team against the Flying Boomerangs and got a taste of the big stage as an important part of the Adam Saad Academy's team for the curtain-raising clash against Collingwood's NGA side at the MCG.

Alwyn Davey Jr. Father - Alwyn Davey

Alwyn Davey Jr has certainly had a busy schedule, representing a number of different teams and performing well on all occasions this year. He was named in the best players six times from 11 NTFL under-16 games with Palmerston in the 2018/19 season before a successful stint with Ashburton in the under-15s, where he kicked five goals from eight games and played a part in the club's Grand Final victory in the second division. He also earned the chance to take on Ayui as a member of the Flying Boomerangs. He has since been able to earn valuable experience against mature bodies in the senior side for Palmerston at the start of the 2019/20 season, lining up alongside his twin brother (below) and father for the Magpies in the first game of the premiership campaign.

Jayden Davey Father - Alwyn Davey

Jayden Davey, just like his identical twin, also mixed his time with Palmerston, Ashburton, Xavier College and the Flying Boomerangs. He kicked eight goals and was among the best eight times from 11 under-16 games with the Magpies before booting five goals from seven games with Ashburton. He also played a key role in Ashburton's premiership and took part in the special game with his family a few

weeks ago, where he kicked a goal on his senior debut against St Mary's. Congratulations to the whole family!



The Davey boys - Alwyn Jr (left), Alwyn Sr and Jayden (right)

Luca Alessio Father - Steve Alessio

Luca Alessio joined Carlos Egan among the leading players for Strathmore this year with five goals and five mentions in the best from 13 games. The son of premiership Bomber Steve Alessio led the way in the side's deep finals campaign and was rewarded with success as the club's best finals player.

Will Hamilton Father - Paul Hamilton

Will Hamilton took to the field six times for Golden Square this year, sharing between the senior and reserves teams. He was particularly impressive in the top team in June when he played a key role in a strong victory against Kyneton, kicking two goals.

Luke Barnard Father - Paul Barnard

Luke Barnard certainly made his mark for Essendon Doutta Stars this year, with the son of 2000 premiership player Paul making the team's best players five times in his 13 games for the division three side. He was also elevated into the club's division one - a great reward for his efforts.

Alex Alessio Father - Steve Alessio

The younger brother of Luca, Alex Alessio also impressed for Strathmore in 2019, making it all the way to the under-13 team's successful Grand Final where his team proved too strong for Westmeadows. Alex got into the best players on three occasions from his 17 games and booted five goals throughout the exciting season.



CLICK TO WATCH:
James Hird Academy Clinics

Around The Grounds

Flight Squad cont.

Noah Caracella **Father – Blake Caracella**

A son of returning club hero Blake Caracella, Noah was a shining light for Newtown and Chilwell in their premiership-winning AFL Barwon league season at under-13 level. Noah caused plenty of headaches for opposing defenders, booting 10 goals from 15 games.



Noah Caracella

Alijah Davey **Father – Alwyn Davey**

The younger brother of Alwyn Jr and Jayden, Alijah Davey performed well in the 2018/19 NTFL under-12 competition for Palmerston with five goals and two spots in the best players, as well as being named best on ground in the unfortunate division two Grand Final loss. He is now back in action in the under-14 team and has already kicked two goals from his first two games for the 2019/20 season.



Alijah Davey

Mara Lovett-Murray **Father – Nathan Lovett-Murray**

Mara Lovett-Murray played at school this year, with the Grade 5 student taking the field on 10 occasions in the Associated Public Schools competition for Brighton Grammar.

Aiden Ramanauskas **Father – Adam Ramanauskas**

Aiden Ramanauskas enjoyed his basketball throughout 2019, playing 14 games for St Christopher's Basketball Club and racking up 23 points for the under-12 team.

Logan Daniher **Father – Chris Daniher**

Logan Daniher, son of Chris, represented Ungarie FNC's under-11 team on four occasions this year and made a great impression in the Northern Riverina Football League. He was named in the best in all four games and booted a goal to top it all off.

Taj McPhee **Father – Adam McPhee**

Taj McPhee stepped out for the Barwon Heads Seagulls this year, playing nine games for the under-11s.



Michael Hurley and Jake Stringer attend the first 2019 Flight Squad Development Camp

Around The Grounds

Baby Bombers

Koby Bewick

Father - Darren Bewick

Koby Bewick topped off a brilliant year with a deserved win as the under-11 boys division-one best and fairest in the EDFL. Koby was outstanding for Airport West throughout the year, kicking 23 goals from his 16 games. But he wasn't just restricted to just the under-11 team, stepping up for a further six games at under-13 level.



Koby Bewick

Max Alessio

Father - Steve Alessio

Max Alessio joined his older brothers with a great effort for Strathmore, putting together 14 impressive games and being named in the best players three times.

Taitum Dempsey

Father - Courtenay Dempsey

Taitum Dempsey's games were split among a variety of divisions for Greenvale this year, with his eight games shared across divisions five, six and seven at under-11 level in the EDFL. He was terrific across the season, claiming a position among the best players six times.

Cove McPhee

Father - Adam McPhee

Cove McPhee was another young McPhee to enjoy playing for Barwon Heads this year, taking the field nine times for the Seagulls.

Lucas Ramanauskas

Father - Adam Ramanauskas

Lucas Ramanauskas didn't join his older brother on the basketball court, opting instead for football and playing nine under-nine games for Strathmore.

Rylan Johnson

Father - Mark Johnson

Rylan Johnson was another young Bomber to run out for Strathmore, joining Lucas in the under-nine yellow team on nine occasions.

Noah Peverill

Father - Damien Peverill

Noah Peverill also played in the under-nine yellow competition in the EDFL, lining up for Moonee Valley on 13 occasions.



Noah Peverill

Jacob Lloyd

Father - Matthew Lloyd

Jacob Lloyd continues to dabble in a variety of sports and played Saturday soccer this year. He also joined many other young JHA members at a number of sessions at the club and had the chance to learn from Essendon legend Kevin Sheedy, who taught him some kicking and handball techniques.



Jacob Lloyd

Brand's bright future

Exciting NGA prospect Cody Brand models his game on club legend Dustin Fletcher and early signs have shown he certainly has a bright future ahead.

A lifelong Essendon supporter, the key-position player has thrived at The Hangar and says it has been amazing to learn from James Hird Academy head coach Heath Hocking while gaining regular defensive insights from Fletcher.

"It's pretty cool, because I'm an Essendon supporter and I've always idolised Dustin. I play full-back and I model my game a lot around him," Brand said.

"I've known Heath, too, growing up supporting the Bombers, so it's pretty surreal to now be training with them. I find it pretty amazing."

Brand has also soaked up Fletcher's knowledge with his school side at Essendon Grammar, where the club legend oversees the backline.

"Dustin helps out a bit, so I get a little bit more one-on-one time with him. He takes control of the backs and I played down in the backline for the whole year this year.

"He helped me out and gave me a few tips and tricks, so it's pretty handy having his support."

Brand will be eligible for the 2020 draft and says the academy has been a big boost for his development on and off the field since joining the program at the start of 2018.

"It's helped me enormously, both with strength through the gym and also through a lot of the craft work we do in the sessions.

"It's a great help. Last week we covered mental health and preparation. We've got a cooking session, which will be pretty cool,

and we do a real variety of things here."

When not playing for his school this year, Brand was impressing in the NAB League as an underage player for the Calder Cannons.

The 195cm youngster averaged 7.9 disposals and 2.5 rebound 50s playing predominantly in defence in his 10 games for the Cannons this year, but also showed his versatility in adding three goals.

Brand's impressive efforts saw him selected as one of just 48 talented draft prospects to take part in the NAB AFL All Stars curtain-raising match ahead of the Grand Final at the MCG, but the level-headed 17-year-old isn't getting ahead of himself.

"It would be a childhood dream come true, I always imagined it. But there's another 12 months and a lot of hard work to go, so we'll see what happens when the time comes.

"I just want to play the best brand of footy I can play, whether that be at school footy or with Calder, and give myself every opportunity come next year for something to happen."

Brand's proud Indigenous roots pass through from his grandfather, who moved to Victoria from the Ben Lomond nation in Tasmania, and he says the rich and long-standing Indigenous history at Essendon has given him something special to look up to.

"You hear the stories of Michael Long, where he came from, and even Anthony McDonald-Tipungwuti we've got running around now.

"You hear those stories and it makes you appreciate what you're a part of and it's something you can look forward to for the years to come."



Cody Brand in action for Calder Cannons

Rama's special moment

Essendon premiership player Adam Ramanauskas says the James Hird Academy's annual guard of honour game is always a "very special" occasion.

Ramanauskas, who played a key role in the Bombers' success in 2000, praised the club for the meaningful connection it has with its past players when he spoke before Essendon's clash with Port Adelaide in round 20.

"It's very special and very important. The club does a great job in involving the past players and living one of its values, which is the heritage of the football club," Ramanauskas said.

"Seeing some old teammates and their kids growing up, and walking out with the boys is something very special and they look forward to it every year."

Ramanauskas has three sons in the JHA and he said their interest in the Bombers continued to grow as he maintains his passion for the red and black.

"I try to get to four or five games a year and then through work (commentary) as well, it's probably another four or five, so I do see enough of them live.

"But I'm always watching on TV and the kids have taken a real interest in it now. My middle one Lucas is playing at Strathmore at the moment and he just finished his first season, so he's loving that.

"I'll always take an interest in the club, it's hard not to."

Ramanauskas' premiership teammate Dustin Fletcher has assisted with coaching in the academies this year under head coach and fellow former Bomber Heath Hocking, and he lauded the pair for their work in contributing to the next crop of Essendon stars.

"I think that's one of the most important parts of it, because 'Buddha' (Hocking) and 'Fletch' have absolutely lived Essendon's values for all of their lives.

"Now they are passing those on to the next generation, hopefully with some father-son players. I think it's so important and the club made great choices there."

Fletcher has enjoyed joining the coaching ranks in the program and said there was plenty of exciting talent coming through the system.

"I've enjoyed it. Heath heads up the program and does a great job," Fletcher said at Marvel Stadium.

"I've been in there on a Monday and also during this week, so it's been really good and it's good to see all of the kids about.

"Some are pretty young, but the older boys that we've got in the program do a really good job."



CLICK TO WATCH:

James Hird Academy Guard of Honour 2019



Adam Ramanauskas with son Lucas at this year's JHA guard of honour

Hocking enjoying transition to coaching

James Hird Academy head coach Heath Hocking says he has enjoyed the challenge of adjusting to life as a coach.

After retiring at AFL level at the end of 2017, Hocking was quickly swept up by the club for the important role and he says taking on the responsibility has been a great learning experience.

"Going from a player to coaching, it's really just about switching your mindset to thinking about drills and what you want to get out of them, rather than just knocking them off as a player," Hocking said.

"Coming up with drills that are going to be beneficial for the players has been a challenge - there are only so many things you can do so you have to get creative.

"Over the time I've been doing the role, it's been about being more confident in talking to the kids and teaching them different parts of skill acquisition. It's been challenging, but really enjoyable."

Hocking said taking the reins as captain of the club's VFL side in 2018 was valuable and gave him a boost for performing the coaching role.

"Teaching young guys who you play with is a good experience as well, so that gave me a lot of confidence in doing that for younger kids.

"All of that packaged together creates a really good opportunity to grow and gain more experience, so it's been really good."

He said one of the most rewarding aspects of the job had been seeing the talented young players embracing the fun of the sport.

"You see kids who are just enjoying their football, which is really good, because as an AFL footballer it becomes a job.

"We've got a lot of father-son kids, so they've grown up with their

dads as footballers and it's really good to get them all together and see them interact with each other, enjoy it and to teach them a few things along the way."

Hocking played 126 senior games for Essendon, playing alongside current Bombers and those who now have children within the JHA.

He said having that experience running onto the ground with many Dons who are still on the list had greatly helped his ability to get them to buy into the program.

"We have players come through like Michael Hurley, Jake Stringer, Josh Begley and Marty Gleeson, among others, to share their knowledge as well.

"It's helped that I've earned a bit of their respect after playing with them and they're happy to help out.

"I know the AFL system is demanding and they get pulled left, right and centre, so for them to take time to help out with my guys is something I really appreciate."

Hocking plays a vital role in many of the young players' dreams of getting drafted, but he said it was important to understand that wasn't the sole objective of the academy.

"We're just trying to get them to a stage where they're improving. The be-all and end-all isn't about getting drafted - it's about making them better people.

"If guys don't get drafted, that's not a drama. It's about how they leave the program - how they've improved on and off the field.

"Getting drafted is the icing on the cake, but that's out of my hands and up to the recruiters."



Heath Hocking is playing a key role in helping young players get drafted



Meet Max Fletcher

Age: 17

Nickname: Fletch

Football club: Calder Cannons, Aberfeldie, PEGS

Position: Centre half-forward

Hobbies & interests: PS4, basketball, watching NFL, all sports

Favourite AFL player: Michael Hurley

Favourite musician: Post Malone

Favourite TV show: Love Island

Get Social

Want to stay up to the date with the James Hird Academy?

Make sure to follow the JHA on Facebook and Instagram for all the latest news, behind the scenes pictures and more.

Hashtag **#JamesHirdAcademy** to feature on our page!



facebook.com/jameshirdacademy



[@jameshirdacademy](https://instagram.com/jameshirdacademy)

