

THE WASH-UP

with Grady Hudc

Hawks stake claim as era's best

AS an avid supporter of the Geelong Football Club, it pains me to think that Hawthorn could even come close to the imposing legacy forged by the Cats over the past eight years.

However, the Hawks' flogging of Sydney in the AFL grand final on Saturday suggests that legacy could indeed be in danger of being surpassed.

Hawthorn's back-to-back grand final wins, a feat never achieved by the Cats during their recent premiership years, takes them to three flags from four grand final appearances in just seven years.

Like Geelong, the Hawks are preparing for life without their ageing

stars (Sam Mitchell, Luke Hodge, Brian Lake and Shaun Burgoyne are all 30 or older) while still remaining competitive during the transition.

Saturday's result shows they are doing that perfectly.

There was a big cloud of uncertainty as to how Hawthorn's forward line would cope losing Lance 'Buddy' Franklin to the Swans this year.

As was evident by the carnage the Hawthorn attack created on the weekend, it appears to be coping just fine.

Cult-hero Jarryd Roughead has gone to another level since Buddy departed, as a result of him spending more time as a permanent forward rather than pinch-hitting in the ruck as he was when Franklin

patrolled the forward 50.

Furthermore, it has given guys like Luke Breust and Jack Gunston the chance to show just how good they really are – they certainly haven't disappointed, both booting more than 50 goals each in arguably career-best years wearing the brown and gold.

But what is most impressive about the Hawks isn't their rolled-gold, star players, it's their bottom-tier players.

If, at the start of the year, someone had told me Will Langford would kick three goals and have 21 disposals in a grand final I would have asked 'Will who?'

But now, in just his first full AFL season, (he played one game for the

Hawks in 2013), Langford has become an integral part of the Hawthorn juggernaut, highlighted by his crucial 29 touches and one goal in the nail-biting preliminary final thriller against Port Adelaide.

Another is young ruckman Jonathan Ceglar, who narrowly missed out on grand final selection after the club picked the more experienced Ben McEvoy.

The 23-year-old, who was discarded by Collingwood at the end of 2012 without playing a game, was rookie-listed by the Hawks the following year and has had a breakout season in 2014 during McEvoy's absence with injury.

The odds showed that the Swans were the heavily-favoured team

heading into the premiership decider, and they played like a team had bought into their own hype.

Hawthorn was comprehensive in every aspect; they ran harder, they ran harder and, importantly, they were hungrier.

Should the Hawks maintain their hunger into next season, and a fit and healthy list, they are a chance to notch a grand final repeat not seen since the Brisbane Lions won three-in-a-row in 2001 and '03.

If they do that, the argument about who is the best team of recent era would have to sway in favour of the Hawks – as hard as fact is, for a Cats' fan, to admit

James' giant step

STARPLEX Swimming Club's James McKechnie took an important step in his career this week by representing Australia at the FINA World Cup Short Course competition in Hong Kong.

The meet, which finished last night, is the 19-year-old's first at international level, and also the first time representing his country, and he spoke with *The Buniyip* prior to leaving last Friday.

The World Cup, this year, consists of seven separate meets, beginning in August and concluding in November, across a variety of Asian, Middle Eastern and European cities.

With McKechnie aiming to compete at the 2016 Rio Olympics, he, and his coach, Stephen Garner, decided it was time to add some international experience to the resume.

"Rio is in two years and so we thought if I make the team to go to Rio I will have no international experience in my back pocket going into that," McKechnie said.

"So we just thought we need to go to this meet to get some international experience."

To be eligible for the short course World Cup, McKechnie had to first meet the FINA points standards, which are determined by comparing race times against the world record time, and also be given the 'all-clear' from Swimming Australia.

Garner, who travelled to Hong Kong with his swimmer, said the meeting was the first step in building towards selection for Rio and beyond.

"We have to plan for each year, and this is the first step in terms of international competition," Garner said.

"Even beyond that...he's only just turned

19 now, so he's starting to look pretty good age-wise for not only Rio, but the Commonwealth Games in 2018 and also the next Olympics after that, Tokyo 2020.

"So the next six years are pretty big for him as a swimmer and that's what he's looking at, so that's what we're aiming at."

Garner knows what it takes for a swimmer to compete at international level – he coached Samantha Marshall, who went on to win silver in the 100m breaststroke at the 2010 Delhi Commonwealth Games.

He said McKechnie, whose pet discipline is also the breaststroke, has similar traits to his former pupil.

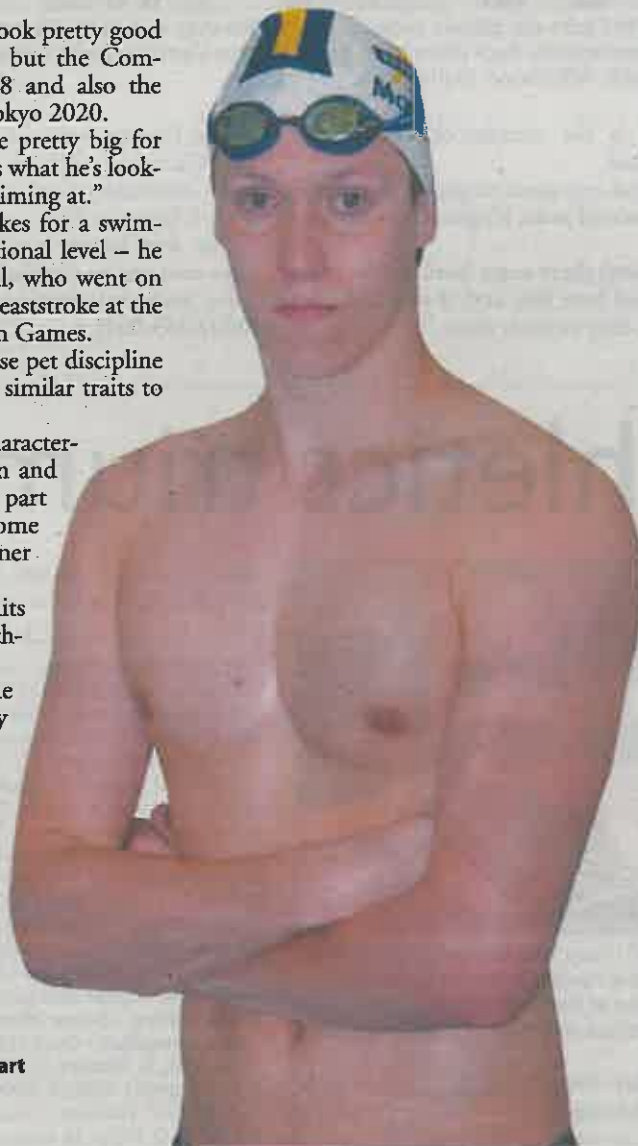
"They've got similar characteristics in their determination and actual ability to fulfil that part of the plan, that is just to come and not miss training," Garner said.

"They're the common traits that belong to successful athletes."

"James is a very good time manager, he's a very, very good trainer and he's a pretty level-headed kid, too."

STARPLEX Swimming Club's James McKechnie has spent the past two days representing Australia at the FINA World Cup short course competition.

PHOTO: Alec Urquhart



SIXTY SECS

with Freeling Netball Club president Toni Oliv speaking about the newly appointed senior coach, Susan O'Brien.

When did the club appoint O'Brien? We had the discussions about a fortnight ago and she confirmed that to us on Saturday night at our senior presentation.

How long has O'Brien committed to coaching the senior ones? Fortunately, she has been able to commit to two years, and also with an additional, maybe, couple of months at the start of 2017 in case we need to change the reins and have someone else step in if she decides to stop coaching.

Has O'Brien been involved with the club before? She's very well respected in our club; she brought the club to two premierships in '97 and '98. She knows our club values and she knows our direction, so she's pretty much on the same page as the committee and the development committee, which is great.

Has O'Brien indicated she will be bringing any new ideas? She coached Oakdale when she left in '03, so she's got a lot of contacts still there. We haven't had an outside coach coach us for quite some time, so we're looking forward to any new ideas that she'll bring.

Outgoing coach Rebecca Eales will depart the club after just one year in the job. What was behind her decision to leave? She found it a challenge this year to travel, she does live in Adelaide, but also she just didn't think she was quite ready to give the senior ones what they needed. There's still good morale within the team but she just didn't think tactics-wise, and skill levels, she could develop them any further.

Do you think with a new coach at the helm the side can improve next year? In our top two sides, we've got girls that have a massive amount of potential, but I don't think they've given themselves the opportunity to play at their best and I think Susan will bring that out in them. We got team leaders like Katie Clark and Jess Schirn and they'll benefit greatly from Susan's coaching.

Mighty Maher's maiden trip

MEMBERS of the Gawler Central, Wilston and South Gawler football clubs were out in force at the Gawler races on Sunday to cheer home their star filly, Mighty Maher.

It was the three-year-old's first start, and came up against some strong runners in the second race of the day – the three-year-old maiden plate over 1100 metres.

While she only managed an eighth-placed finish, it would no doubt have been a great experience for the boys to see their star filly hit the track competitively for the first time.

Tigers' future to be decided

GAWLER Central will be hoping to emerge from its player discussions this week having gained the signatures of stars Charlie Molyneux and Daniel Stanley for the 2015 season.

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The Tigers commenced discussions with their playing group this week after returning from their footy trip as they look to retain their premiership-winning list.

It's no secret that the SANFL Adelaide Crows are interested in the two midfielders, but should they recommit to Centrals for another year, it will go a long way towards the club's premiership defence.

Netball panel to grow?

DISCUSSIONS between BL&G netball umpires at an informal luncheon last month have raised the idea of an umpire from each club being represented on the

association's umpiring panel.

The initiative would effectively mean two panel members would be present at each game to assist with mentoring umpires.

While it is just an idea, for now, having each club represented on the panel could potentially mean more transparency between the association and clubs, and provide a forum for more open discussion, which can only be positive.

Feeley hangs up the boots

MALLALA's gun forward, and long-time servant, Daniel Feeley, has called time on his playing career at the club.

Despite not getting the fairy tale he would

have hoped for, with the Magpies suffering a heart-breaking two-point loss to Hahndorf in the grand final, Feeley certainly finished his final season in good form.

The superboot slotted a cool 57 goals in 19 games this year, placing him fourth on the league goal-kicking table.

Whitwell off overseas

MALLALA will also be without midfielder Liam Whitwell for the 2015 season.

The 2009 league medallist will be trading the footy boots for snow boots as he embarks on a 12-month teaching exchange in Canada.

Meanwhile, Jordan Clements was named the club's A-grade best and fairest player at the presentation night recently, edging out Monty Montgomerie and capping off a stellar season for the Magpies.