

AFL draft spotlight on Jets young guns

The Western Jets expect to see a number of their stars step up to the AFL after this week's draft, with Zak Butters and Xavier O'Halloran topping the list.

Despite missing half the season following shoulder surgery, Butters is expected to hear his name called out in the first round on November 22, and Jets talent manager Jy Bond said there's a good reason so many rate him so highly.

"What stood out for me with Butters is the fact he was able to play through that shoulder injury and play to a high standard," Bond said.

"He went through the Vic Metro side playing injured and showed he could cope. He's got a slight frame, but he showed he's tough and courageous which is what really stood out.

"I still think he'll go in the top 15 from all reports, and he's a fantastic character and a good kid so he'll work hard when he gets into an AFL system."

A slick mover with good ball use and a big tank, Bond said he could see him being used as an outside midfielder at the start of his career, as well as plenty of time up forward.

O'Halloran enjoyed a strong season for the Jets, Vic Metro, and his school side, captaining all three in a sign of his leadership potential at the next level.

On top of a string of good results at the draft combine – finishing in the top 10 in the sprint, YoYo, 2km time trial, kicking test and placing second in the agility test – Bond said he had huge upside for any club that picks him up.

"He is just a leader, a very mature kid," Bond said.

"We had multiple times this year where we needed a lift, and he was the one to give us that. He's got a ready made body for the AFL so he'll be eyeing off a spot in the midfield somewhere I would think.

"Personally I think his leadership sets him apart from others. At that level everyone can play, it's a matter of how well they will fit in the system, so if you've got a strong character it takes a lot of the guesswork out for clubs. I think it's just as important as the skill set."

Bond also highlighted Western Bulldogs academy prospect Buku Khamis as a potential draftee, with the former refugee come key defender a chance to make it.

"His athletic profile is second to none, and he's had a very strong year," Bond said. "There's a fair chance that the Bulldogs will bid on him at some stage, and he deserves to be on an AFL list either at the Bulldogs or as a rookie."

Hard running Daly Andrews is also an outside chance to be snapped up, according to Bond.

Ewen McRae



IN THE DOGHOUSE

Like many, I think money has changed football forever and there is no going back, so it's time for a reality check on the state of the game. The points system is the best thing local footy has done in years. Its double effect was to stop teams buying players from other competitions and killing flag aspirations and it encouraged playing current and former junior players. The effect the latter will have on club cultures and tradition in the future will be invaluable. The points system also heralded a salary cap – the greatest white elephant of all time – and it's time to scrap it. Money is here to stay so let clubs pay players whatever they want. It is their business what they pay and if they can afford to pay Billy Bloggs \$1500 a game, let them. He is still a five point player and that is more important than what money he pockets. You can't run footy like a nanny state. Badly run clubs will still fall into financial trouble but at least the salary cap will be gone.

Plenty of movement in the November transfer window in local football. Albanvale has scored a major coup signing Nathan Black from Werribee Districts. I can see him having the same impact at Cobra-land as Brent Sheean had this year at Point Cook Centrals. Josh Mould is a handy pick-up for the Tigers from Wyndhamvale. Caroline Springs has lost a few good ones with Jason Degabriele, Rex Hickman, Daniel Backus and Justin Brook all heading to the Mallee Eagles. Liam Cavanagh departs Sunshine for Strathmore.

The Bulldogs past players end of year function also served as the AGM where the current committee was 100 per cent returned under president Ross Abbey. The group has thrived in recent times and the work of the committee and Bulldogs liaison manager Linda Murray is paying dividends. Jumper presentations to Gordon Casey, Kevin White, Alex Gardiner and Lindsay Gilbee last weekend highlighted the reach the group has these days over those who wore the red, white and blue in the past. Recently retired premiership player Clay Smith spoke at the lunch about his highs and lows at the kennel in a career cut short by knee injuries. Sad to note the passing last week of Eileen Sutton, known to all as Chubb, the widow of the great Bulldogs legend Charlie. What a wonderful woman. Condolences to the family.

Kevin Hillier

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Teen's golden age of track

By Tara Murray

The hard work Frank Mazza has put in during the off season is starting to pay off.

In his first two competitions of the track and field season, Mazza has claimed five gold medals.

First, the 13-year-old competed in the School Sports Victoria Secondary Track and Field Championships in late October.

Having missed out on qualifying for the event, through being away at another competition, he represented his school Brookside College in just one event, the aged 12-13 boys javelin.

He claimed gold, throwing five metres further than second place.

Two weeks later, Mazza competed at the 2018 Vic All Schools Track and Field Championships, again representing his school.

He claimed gold in the under-14 javelin, long jump, triple jump and 90-metre hurdles.

The Caroline Springs resident said he was unsure how he was going to go at both competitions.

"The season had only just started," he said. "It was really good fun. I was really happy and you could tell that all the hard work I had been doing had paid off."

The Vic All Schools Track and Field Championships represented the first time he had competed over the 90 metre hurdles. Despite this he was able to taste instant success.

He won the long jump and also jumped a personal best in the triple jump.

Mazza said he had been doing a lot of work in the off season. He trains with Sonja Kiernan and her crew at Proactive Athletic Coaching and Development, as well with Tim Golder at Keilor Athletics Club.

"I've been trying to get my fitness up by doing laps of the oval," he said. "I'm feeling more fit."

He said he would look to continue to build across all his events and look to improve on his long distance running in preparation for multi-event competitions.

Next up is the 2018 Australian All Schools Track and Field Championships in Cairns next month, where he will compete in the javelin, triple jump, long jump and 90 metre hurdles.

Having won three silvers at the same event 12 months ago, he has one aim this time round.

"Hopefully I go better than last time and I'm aiming for gold." Mazza is the November nominee for the Don Deeble Rising Star award.

The award, hosted by the Sunshine Western Region Sports Club and Star Weekly, recognises young athletes from the western suburbs who have achieved outstanding results at state and/or national levels.

Mazza will receive \$1000, donated by the Yarraville Club Cricket Club, and other prizes to assist him in achieving his sporting goals.



Frank Mazza is the November nominee for the Don Deeble Rising Star award. (Mark Wilson)



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