

# JAME5HIRD

A C A D E M Y

EST 2010



JHA graduates Tom Hird and Cody Brand during a recent training session with the Bombers.

## Welcome to the 23rd edition of the James Hird Academy newsletter.

In another challenging year navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, 2021 marked Harmit Singh's first full season as JHA coach.

Harmit oversaw two development camps undertaken at the club this year, and in this edition provides insights into his experiences and how the JHA's current crop of talent is progressing.

While unfortunately not all kids could finish their respective seasons due to COVID-19 restrictions, we look forward to a bright 2022.

As we wrap up the year, it's time to sit back, relax and enjoy the latest edition of the JHA newsletter.

## From the coach

Hi Bombers fans,

Reflecting on my first year of coaching the James Hird Academy at Essendon, I can see how much I have learned, not just about coaching but about myself as well.

I know that my role goes far beyond simply getting players drafted, having a more holistic focus in guiding these kids towards being better footballers and, more importantly, better people and leaders within our community.

I look to instill the values of the club and pass on my experiences, having played in state league programs and coaching for over 10 years.

The year had its challenges with the COVID-19 pandemic not giving the players and I a clean run at it, meaning we had to connect in different ways and help educate and develop our squad through lockdown.

We focused a lot on the fundamentals of football such as kicking, handballing and marking, while also adding the elements of decision-making, game sense and conditioning.

We were able to run two development camps over school holidays, which was very well received by the squad.

Unfortunately, we weren't able to have an AFL game-day experience this year with the usual Baby Bombers guard of honour, and border restrictions made it impossible to engage with our remote Next Generation Academy zone on the Tiwi Islands and in West Arnhem.

The growth of the JHA and its importance in identifying and adding talented NGA prospects has a profound impact on the club. We are bringing in players from all different cultures and backgrounds, and providing a positive learning environment.

A highlight for me will be seeing seven players participate in our AFL pre-season program. This provides players with a great opportunity to grow as players and better understand the behaviours and standards the club is trying to set. If they are drafted, they'll come into our program at an accelerated level (Josh Eyre and Cody Brand trained with the club in 2020 while on NAB League lists).

With my feet well and truly under the desk now, I have a really clear vision of what I want our program to look like in season 2022. It's a year of great opportunity with upwards of 12-13 players participating in NAB League programs and a number of boys and girls coming through in the Flight Squad and Baby Bombers, providing the club opportunities to create a pipeline of talent and build an even stronger connection with families.

Thanks to everyone for the support, and I look forward to a bigger and better 2022.



**Harmit Singh**

James Hird Academy head coach



JHA head coach Harmit Singh oversees an NGA game against the Saints in July.



# 2021 JHA list

## ACCELERATION GROUP

PLAYER	AGE	PARENT/NGA
Breyben Tipiloura	18	NGA
Joshua Misiti	18	Joe Misiti
Ngawi Moore	18	Nathan Lovett-Murray
Alex Hird	18	James Hird
Tex Wanganeen	18	Tex Wanganeen
Jordan Bourke	18	NGA
Anthony Munkara	17	NGA
Carlos Egan	17	NGA
Ayui Makieng	17	NGA
Alwyn Davey Jnr	17	Alwyn Davey
Jayden Davey	17	Alwyn Davey
Reuben Rode	17	NGA
Matthew Foley	17	NGA
Luca Alessio	17	Steve Alessio
Will Hamilton	16	Paul Hamilton
Luke Barnard	16	Paul Barnard
Ryan Eyre	16	NGA

## BABY BOMBERS (BOYS)

PLAYER	AGE	PARENT/NGA
Rylan Johnson	10	Mark Johnson
Noah Peverill	10	Damien Peverill
Jacob Lloyd	9	Matthew Lloyd
Lenny Solomon	9	Dean Solomon
Cruz Davey	8	Alwyn Davey
Connor Stanton	8	Brent Stanton
Harlan Ryder	8	Patrick Ryder
Edward Mercuri	7	Mark Mercuri
Bohdi McPhee	7	Adam McPhee
Aidan Stanton	6	Brent Stanton
Henri Mercuri	5	Mark Mercuri
Mekhi Dempsey	5	Courtenay Dempsey
William Howlett	5	Ben Howlett
Joshua Ramanauskas	4	Adam Ramanauskas
Roman Hocking	1	Heath Hocking
Wolf Watson	1	Jobe Watson

## FLIGHT SQUAD

PLAYER	AGE	PARENT/NGA
Noah Caracella	15	Blake Caracella
Isaac Kako	15	NGA
Alex Alessio	15	Steve Alessio
Aljah Davey	14	Alwyn Davey
Mara Lovett-Murray	13	Nathan Lovett-Murray
Aidan Ramanauskas	13	Adam Ramanauskas
Logan Daniher	13	Chris Daniher
Taj McPhee	13	Adam McPhee
Koby Bewick	12	Darren Bewick
William Hird	12	James Hird
Max Alessio	12	Steve Alessio
Thomas Caracella	12	Blake Caracella
Taitum Dempsey	11	Courtenay Dempsey
Cove McPhee	11	Adam McPhee
Lucas Ramanauskas	11	Adam Ramanauskas

## JHA (GIRLS) 0-18 YEARS OLD

PLAYER	AGE	PARENT/NGA
Jaeda Lloyd	15	Matthew Lloyd
Georgia Caracella	14	Blake Caracella
Chenae Dempsey	13	Courtenay Dempsey
Kira Lloyd	12	Matthew Lloyd
Ivy Daniher	11	Chris Daniher
Gemma Bewick	9	Darren Bewick
Chari Johnson	8	Mark Johnson
Scarlett Peverill	8	Damien Peverill
Matilda Solomon	7	Dean Solomon
Harmony Lovett-Murray	7	Nathan Lovett-Murray
Georgia Barnard	6	Paul Barnard
Mia Peverill	6	Damien Peverill
Charlize Davey	6	Alwyn Davey
Juniper Watson	3	Jobe Watson
Sophie Howlett	3	Ben Howlett
Plum Wanganeen	1	Gavin Wanganeen
Layla Davey	1	Alwyn Davey
Quinn Dempsey	1	Courtenay Dempsey

# Around The Grounds

## Acceleration Group

### Josh Misiti

The son of Bombers great Joe, Misiti split his time playing school football with PEGS and Calder Cannons in the NAB League. The 18-year-old was an outstanding leader and showed great team care across both teams playing predominantly as a key defender.

### Nyawari Moore

The son of 145-game Bomber Nathan Lovett-Murray, Nyawi split his time between local football with Woorinen in the Central Murray Football League and the Bendigo Pioneers, where he played four NAB League matches.

### Ayui Makieng

The NGA product had a strong 2021 season representing the Calder Cannons under-17s at the Metro Championships. He was close to being added to the Calder Cannons' under-19s list prior to the state going into lockdown. Ayui played some excellent senior football with UHS VU Football Club in Premier C VAFA, highlighted by a best-on-ground display against Ivanhoe Grammarians where his intercept marking at centre half-back was a feature. He has an outstanding attitude and is incredibly driven to better his football.



Ayui Makieng (right)

### Tex Wanganeen

It's been a frustrating couple of years for Tex, with the state going into lockdowns and him missing a large portion of 2021 as he recovered from a navicular injury. Tex has had to overcome adversity and showed great resilience to get back to playing footy mid-season. He was incredibly diligent through his period out of the game, and was rewarded with selection in the Xavier College first XVIII upon his return to play. In his one game back at the level, Tex was named in the college's best players in a narrow win over local rival Scotch College, which helped ensure the 2021 first XVIII APS Premiership would be awarded to Xavier.

### Carlos Egan

The NGA product had an excellent season in 2021 representing the Calder Cannons under-17s at the Metro Championships, before being rewarded with a debut in the under-19s NAB League team. Carlos also was a key member of the St. Bernard's College ACC Premiership team, playing predominantly as a small forward with a number of mark of the year contenders. Carlos was coached at Strathmore under-18s by former Bombers premiership player Steve Alessio.

### Alwyn Davey Jr

The son of 100-gamer Alwyn, Alwyn Jr had a very consistent season splitting his time between the Oakleigh Chargers (under-17s Metro Championships) and first XVIII football with Xavier College. Xavier College first XVIII coach and former Crow Sam Shaw said Davey Jr "played a significant role as a high half-forward with his ability to get up the ground and back, providing great connection with his decision-making and skill".

### Jayden Davey

The son of 100-gamer Alwyn, Jayden returned from injury mid-year to play in Xavier College's first XVIII premiership team, two years after injuring his ACL. Jayden has learned to look after his body and come through a really difficult period strongly. There were some absolute flashes of brilliance upon his return with a four-goal haul against Melbourne Grammar.

### Anthony Munkara

The 191cm Munkara, who hails from the Tiwi Islands, impressed after making the move to Westminster College in South Australia. Anthony took some time to adjust to a new life and team, but as the season went on, he kept showing growth and adjusted to the standard. He showed some flashes of brilliance, highlighted by a nine-goal display against Trinity. Anthony represented the Northern Territory in October and played two senior matches for the Tiwi Bombers, kicking nine goals.



Anthony Munkara (Photo: Mark Blake)

### Reuben Rode

It was a breakout year for Reuben, who is also an elite level cricketer. Reuben represented the Calder Cannons under-17s at the Metro Championships and narrowly missed selection for the Vic Metro under-17s squad. He split the rest of his time between Assumption College and Calder Cannons under-19s, where he showed great creativity playing off half-back.

### Matthew Foley

The NGA product represented Calder Cannons under-17s at the Metro Championships and then split his time between St. Bernard's College in the ACC (premiers) and Strathmore under-18s under the tutelage of Bombers great Steven Alessio. Super consistent with his behaviours and habits, Matt's form saw him rewarded with NAB League under-19s selection, where he slotted in with ease playing off half-back.

# Around The Grounds

## Acceleration Group

### Luca Alessio

The son of former 184-game and premiership Bomber Steve, Luca showed outstanding growth and development splitting his time between Strathmore under-18s and school football with St. Bernard's (ACC premiers). He was best on ground as a centre half-forward against Parade College in the ACC Grand Final. Boasting an outstanding attitude and work rate, Luca was rewarded with NAB League selection for Calder Cannons against Murray Bushrangers, where he kicked one goal.

### Luke Barnard

The son of former 140-game and premiership Bomber Paul, Luke played eight matches with Essendon Doutta Stars under-16s in the EDFL and was named in the best players on six sessions, highlighting his consistency across an interrupted season due to the COVID pandemic.

### Ryan Eyre

The younger brother of Josh, Ryan split his time between eventual AGSV premiers Assumption College and Northern Football League club Kilmore. The 190cm Eyre shows excellent aerial power and his ability to hit targets with both sides of the body is a feature. He represented Vic Kickstart in 2021, which is a pathway to the Flying Boomerangs. He has shown excellent signs in the early stages of the NAB League pre-season with Calder Cannons.

### Will Hamilton

The son of former 105-game Bomber Paul, Will has had an interrupted couple of years in respect to his football due to the COVID pandemic and a knee injury. Will was able to come back and play one game on limited minutes with Golden Square late in the 2021 season, and is looking forward to attacking the upcoming pre-season.



(L-R) Carlos Egan, Matt Foley and Luca Alessio representing Calder Cannons.



# Around The Grounds

## Flight Squad

### Isaac Kako

An outstanding year for the NGA product who split his time between Pascoe Vale under-16s (EDFL) and Parade College. Isaac won the EDFL under-16 division one best and fairest, with his ball-winning ability and goal sense a feature. He finished the year with selection in the Victorian All Nations (multicultural team), which played against Kickstart (Indigenous team). He was named best on ground in that match is in line for World Team Selection in January.

### Taitum Dempsey

The son of former 133- game Bomber Courtney, Taitum had an excellent season for the Cairns City Lions in Queensland. The skilful youngster came runner-up in the Lions' best and fairest.



Taitum Dempsey

### Alex Alessio

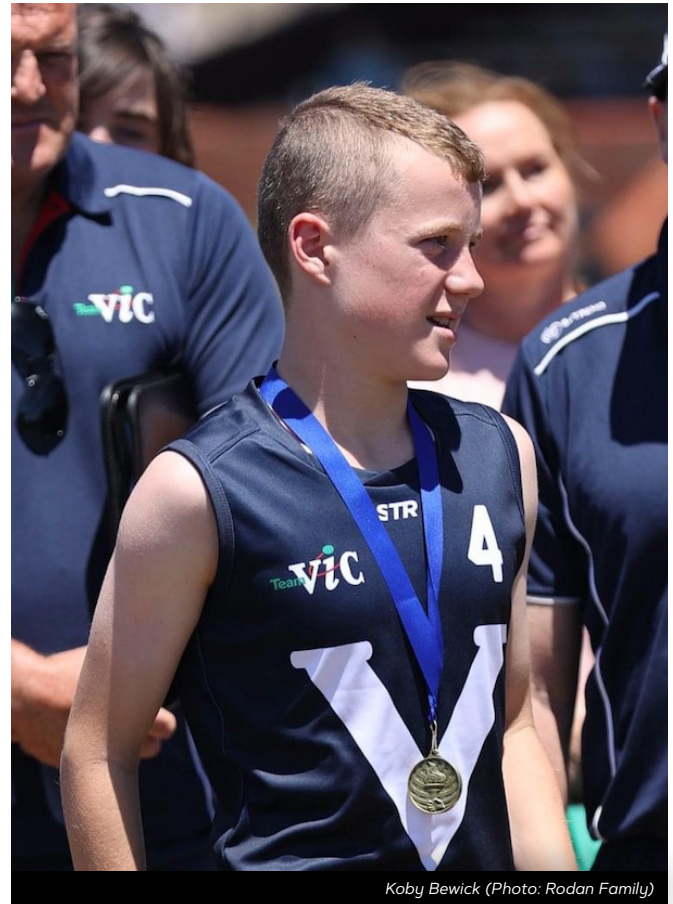
The son of former 184- game and premiership player Steve, Alex played under-16s football with Strathmore in the EDFL. Standing at 195cm, Alex is a developing young ruck who also played in Essendon's under-16s Academy match against St.Kilda in June, showing some terrific aerial power.

### Max Alessio

The son of former 184-game and premiership player Steve, Max played under-12s EDFL with Strathmore, which went through the season undefeated to be named premier.

### Koby Bewick

The son of former 238-game and premiership Bomber Darren, Koby had a stellar season, winning the EDFL under-12s league best and fairest as a star for Strathmore. Koby also captained Vic Metro's under-12s against Vic Country in mid-November, and was awarded best on ground.



Koby Bewick (Photo: Rodan Family)

### Noah Caracella

The son of former 126-game and premiership Bomber Blake, Noah had a strong season with Newtown and Chilwell Football Club in the under-15s, where his team finished second. Noah was also included in the Geelong Falcons' squad.

### Tom Caracella

The son of former 126-game and premiership Bomber Blake, Tom played some excellent football in defence in the second half of the season with Newtown and Chilwell Football Club.

### Chenae Dempsey

The daughter of former 133-game Bomber Courtenay, Chenae had an excellent season playing with the South Cairns Cutters at under-15s level.

### Mara Lovett Murray

The son of former 133-game Bomber Courtenay, Mara played school football this year with Brighton Grammar School in the APS competition.

# 'Small things' fuel big steps for Kako

By Celie Hay

Explosive mid-forward Isaac Kako has been rewarded for his work with Essendon's Next Generation Academy (NGA) by starring at local level.

The 15-year-old played local football at Pascoe Vale and claimed the Essendon District Football League's (EDFL) under-16s best and fairest as a bottom-age player, despite missing several games.

Kako's impressive season was something he attributed to his participation in the NGA and the edge it gave him over his opposition.

"It (NGA) gives you that step ahead of everyone, just learning how to recover, eat well and learn how AFL players actually go about it in their day-to-day lives," Kako said.

"It's really helped me in my daily life and preparing for football matches, what to do post-game and post-training."

Kako, whose parents are from Baghdad, has been part of the Bombers' NGA since 2019.

Despite being nervous when he first visited the NEC Hangar, Kako has relished the opportunity to spend time in a high-performance environment while learning from AFL players.

"It's been a bit nerve-racking but it's been really enjoyable being around that sort of environment and learning what life is actually like as an AFL player. All the facilities just wow you," he said.

"It's been really enjoyable just being around the boys, especially since I'm one of the young boys there.

"Getting the AFL boys to come down and talk to us, Mason Redman came down and had a chat which was pretty cool."

Kako said while the football side of the Academy had been hugely beneficial, the information on preparation and recovery had influenced his performance the most.

"Nutrition and recovery are things I'll take away from the Academy. I don't think I was really doing it right before the Academy," he said.

"Small things like a chocolate milk post-game can really help with soreness and muscle recovery, but I think it's all the information and knowledge that gets provided."

Kako had worked alongside JHA head coach Harmit Singh at previous academies, impressing Singh this year with his diligence, growth mindset and cleanness around the contest.

He credited Singh for his development and improvement.

"Harmit has had a really big influence on me," Kako said.

"He is a useful resource and great coach all round. I've had him as a coach for a couple of academies and he has really helped me with my football."

Kako will travel to Adelaide in January to play for the World Team against The AFL Flying Boomerangs in the under-16 championships.

He has also been invited to be part of Calder Cannons' under-16s team in 2022.



Isaac Kako celebrates Pascoe Vale's under-16s EDFL flag with his dad Laith.



Isaac Kako in action for Pascoe Vale.



Senior Bomber Mason Redman shares some expertise with members of the JHA.



# Another Eyre takes flight

By Celie Hay

A lifelong Bombers fan, Ryan Eyre is relishing the opportunity to train at the NEC Hangar through his time with the James Hird Academy (JHA).

Eyre, who grew up in an Essendon jumper and regularly watched training, said he still can't believe he trains in the same facility as his idols.

"It was the coolest thing ever. It's still unbelievable that I've been able to go into an AFL club," Eyre said.

"Growing up, we used to go down to the club and just watch the boys train because we loved the Bombers so to be a part of it now is unreal."

One Essendon player that Eyre looks up to is his older brother, Josh, who progressed through the JHA to Essendon's senior list via pick No.39 in the 2020 NAB AFL Draft.

Eyre was grateful to watch his brother's pathway to the elite level, gaining inspiration from the way he's pushed through adversity in the early stages of his AFL career.

"It's been great to watch Josh go through the academy and now live out his dream, but he's had so many injuries," he said.

"He didn't play footy for a year or two because of the growing pains in his knees, and that's exactly what I've gone through.

"He has been a really big role model for me, and he is just living my dream, so it's great that we are going through the same stages."



Ryan Eyre has been grateful for the support of JHA head coach Harmit Singh.



Ryan Eyre (sixth from left) and brother Josh (middle, back) at a JHA training session this year.

While Eyre looks up to his older brother, the 16-year-old is also inspired by other Bombers who he likes to base his game off.

"Being around the club and meeting a few of the AFL players was really exciting but just being a part of the club is the main thing, it's really exciting," he said.

"I love the role of Jake Stringer, that mid-forward, that's what I try to be. But I also like the tall-wing of Nik Cox, that's who I probably try to model my game off at the moment."

As Eyre continues to improve his skills, he said JHA coach Harmit Singh had been influential on his development on and off the field.

"Harmit has been unreal for me. He has opened up so many pathways through all these academies that I didn't even know existed, but I've realised how helpful they are," he said.

"With mindset and everything, the Academy has helped me a lot. It's not all just about footy, it's off the field as well. The game-plans, to actually learn about those was really good and then put it into my own game."

For Brad Eyre, father of Josh and Ryan, he could not be more thankful for the opportunities the JHA has provided his sons, as well as the support Singh provided to Josh during the uncertain times of the pandemic.

"Harmit has just been phenomenal. During the COVIC break, he was continuously ringing and checking up on the boys to make sure they were uninjured. Our boys are pretty injury prone," Brad Eyre said.

"He also sent them videos to watch, so it's been phenomenal and we couldn't be happier."

Eyre said his sons felt "unbelievably privileged" to be involved in the JHA, which has been instrumental to their development.

Away from the game, the JHA has also had a wider impact on Josh and Ryan.

"They've been able to do bits of training with other boys which has made them a lot more confident. They were reasonably shy so they've become a lot more confident," he said.

"The boys have always been driven, but they're even more driven because they know that through the opportunities that come their way through the Academy, there's a lot to strive for. They know where they want to go in life."