

VAFA UMPIRE RISING STAR- JAMES HACKETT-SMITH

A question and answer format with Alan Stubbs (current teacher and Premier A grade Goal Umpire team mate of James) follows:

AS: When and where did you first get involved in football/umpiring?

JHS: When I was younger, I played heaps of sports: basketball, football and tennis! Three years ago I began as a basketball referee to earn a bit of money, and later learnt that I really liked this kind of thing - umpiring/refereeing. I enjoy the challenge of trying to control difficult situations, and the self-confidence that you build from it. I have friends who were boundary umpiring footy before me, which encouraged me to start taking that up as well. I started last year, and was going to run the boundary at the SMJFL before a good friend roped me into the VAFA instead, which is of a higher quality - because it's the Amateurs and not juniors - and also more challenging.

I impressed the trainers early by running a 13.9 on the beep test during the pre-season, and was rewarded with a Division 1 match for my first game. The following week I was put in Premier B, and remained there for the rest of the season. I did three Premier A games during the season, including the Preliminary Final. I loved it: the endurance running which suits me perfectly, and being able to get involved in the footy every Saturday afternoon.

For the final game of the year, I had the pleasure of being a part of the umpiring team for the Premier B Grand Final between the St Kevins Old Boys and Old Melburnians. It was a fantastic match, with many lead changes throughout it, and I was absolutely stoked to be able to achieve this in my first year of umpiring.

AS: What are your career highlights?

JHS: This year, I have been a consistent Premier A boundary umpire. A highlight is definitely when I got chosen to umpire the rep game between the VAFA and South Australian Amateur Football League earlier this year. (see photo, James 2nd from left).

In the midst of a fun night at the VAFAUA Pre-Finals Dinner last Monday, I received an award for the Most Improved Boundary Umpire for 2016. I honestly did not expect it at all, and was honoured to receive it in front of

hundreds of other VAFA umpires. Coming into the Finals this year now, I will be putting in my best efforts to try and earn another Grand Final spot.

(AS note: James last week umpired the Preliminary Final and is one of the favourites to get the Premier A grade Grand Final on Sunday 18 September at IKON Park, formerly the Carlton AFL football ground)

AS: Who have been your major influences in umpiring?

JHS: The inclusion of Ryan O'Shea (current VFL umpire) as a boundary umpiring coach and mentor this year has significantly helped many of us improve our games and take our performances to the next level. Himself, along with others like Adrian Pretorius, Tony Hales and Brian Woodhead, inspire me to reach my best.

AS: What are your short term and long term goals/aspirations in umpiring?

JHS: My father is always encouraging me to switch over to field umpiring, but I would like to see how far I can go in this discipline first. It is a hobby I love doing each weekend, and I would love to be able to umpire at the VFL in the future, and maybe someday the AFL as well. For the moment, the VAFAUA is certainly the right place for me to be, and it provides many progressive pathways or opportunities too.

I would encourage anyone who loves a bit of footy and wants to earn some cash or do more running to take up umpiring, as it is a fantastic activity where you meet many great people as well.