

Sport



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His heart's still in it

By JARROD POTTER

TAKING to his adopted homeland's beloved pastime is paying off for Pakenham junior footballer Marlyn Staunton.

In just over two years Staunton, 15, has gone from living in Dublin, Ireland, to captaining the Victorian Diversity team at the 2016 AFL National Diversity Championships in Queensland recently.

It's been a rapid rise through the football ranks for the wily Lions' ruck-rover who has a taste for life in football and wants to keep going with it. Since he got here in 2014, Staunton knew he wanted to become an AFL footballer and follow the famous path of his countrymen into Australia's biggest game.

"Of course I did (played Gaelic football in Ireland) - I had to," Staunton said.

"Gaelic football is always in my heart and will always be my number one sport.

"Back home you hear a lot about the Aussie Rules and if you play Gaelic you've got that chance because of the similarities.

"So when I got over here, when I got on the plane I knew what I wanted to do - might as well take the chance while I'm here and it's given me a chance to see how far I could go.

"I'm loving it and there's no going back now."

Everything about his Victorian Diversity team experience was eye-opening for Staunton, especially earning the captaincy and guiding his side into a grand final.

"It went really well, to be honest - the state camp was great and gave me a taste of what it was like," Staunton said.

"When we got there I was shocked by the heat - coming from Ireland to a hot and dry Queensland - I didn't really get used to it.

"I found out I was captain on the first day I was there and that

was great - really good."

His Victorian side fell just short in the finale - losing to Western Australia by less than a goal - but it wasn't the result that Staunton takes away from his first taste of state representative football.

"Where do I start. There are lots of things to learn and it really gave me a taste of life of where I actually want to go - a footballer's life," Staunton said.

"It's one of the best experiences of my life since I got here - a really good football experience and just the chances and opportunities to give me the right direction to go as a person and not just as a footballer."

The great unifying force of all Victorians - playing, watching, talking and living football - was especially present in the diversity ranks and Staunton was thrilled to learn about the rest of the world through his equally diverse team mates.

"Beside the accent differences

and trying to understand each other, it was really good to learn about the different cultures in the game," Staunton said.

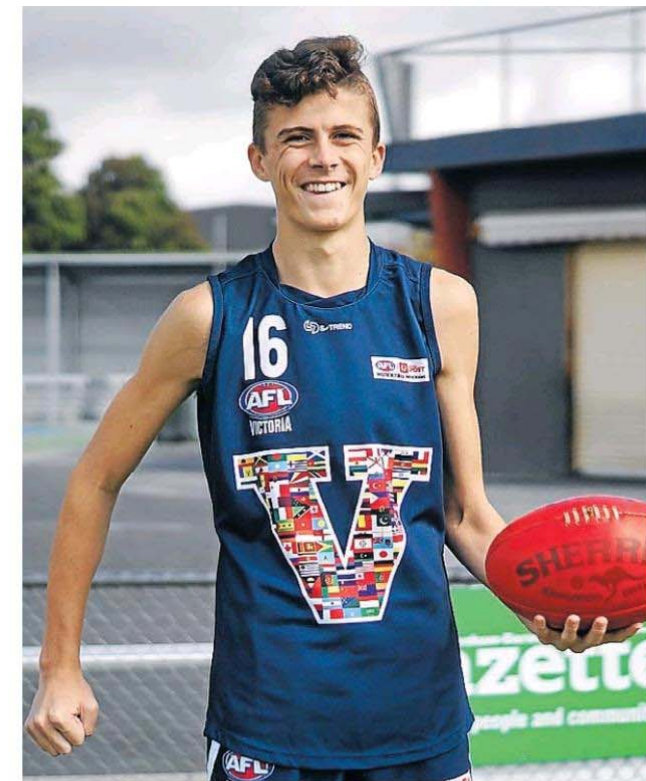
"I'm obviously not the only multicultural boy in my town, but it's good to take away what other people do.

"Different countries and different religions but at the end of the day we all have the same goal."

His efforts at the championships booked his ticket back to Queensland in July - heading off to the Gold Coast with the World under-16 team for the NAB AFL Under-16 Championships.

He was one of the top 30 players who were handpicked from the championships and can't wait to get another chance to impress on the big football stage.

His Pakenham team mate Tot Jok also played for the Victorian team and will also head off with the World under-16 squad.



Irish ex-pat Marlyn Staunton excelled in his first state football campaign with the Victorian Diversity team. 152968

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