

Passion to help footy stars kick goals in life



THE Territory Thunder Football Club has made it a priority that every contracted player be employed or undergoing training or study. Football writer JESS WEBSTER sits down with player wellbeing and indigenous employment officer Cameron Roberts to discuss this vital area of the club's development.



Q: Why is this an important aspect of the club?

A: When the club formed, the two major points it really wanted to exist for was to put a great football side on the park each week and becoming successful, but also start to produce quality people that can then also build a career outside footy.

It's a priority for the board and overrides any football stuff that we do.

Q: What is the current situation off-field like within the club?

A: Out of our current contracted list, we have 98 per cent of people studying or working in some form.

Ideally you would like everyone to be working or studying but at the moment that isn't a bad result considering we have 45-odd contracted players. In terms of previous years it is higher than what it has been.

It's not just Darwin-based, we also have Bradley Palipaminni and Ross Tungatalum on Tiwi that have to be employed.

They have been fortunate enough that the local school at Nguiu has been helping Ross and Territory Heath and Housing has been helping Bradley, but people in Alice Springs also have to be working or studying to be able to play.

Q: What are the some of the challenges you face trying to get people work?

A: There is no shortage of opportunities out there through the connections that we have.

The issue that I face is the job retention side of things.

The players have realised that if they are not prepared



Territory Thunder player wellbeing and indigenous employment officer Cameron Roberts plays a key role for the club on and off the field

to do that work then they won't play.

It's not there as a threat, but it's important that the players know there is more to life than just football and I guess that's what we are trying to instil into the younger players in particular.

Q: Does the club receive any help?

A: This year, with the club now looking after the under-16s and under-18s, in a couple of months most of those under-18s become school leavers and enter the work-



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place, so the role will become even more important.

This year we also have a KPMG Jobs and Training Network, which is a commitment made by a number of businesses within the NT that assist in helping the NTFC help players find work and career development opportunities.

We are pretty lucky in that respect that we have a lot of help from our sponsors and businesses that are prepared to help out our players.

At the moment we will be relying on that job network really heavily in the next 3-4 month period when the school leavers come into it and the recruitment of players for next season.

Q: Has the program been successful so far?

A: I guess the ones that stand out are Shannon Rioli and Kelvin Williams.

They have an opportunity through the NT Government's Indigenous Employ-

ment Program. Basically, Kelvin and Shannon do a 20-week Charles Darwin University Certificate II in Business, and at the completion of that they go into a full-time government job within the department that they would like to do.

Shannon is looking to get into child services and Kelvin is looking to get into corrections. They were guys that before starting the program were a bit up in the air in what they wanted to do, but it has given them an indication of what they really want to be.

Every player has a personal development plan between myself and them, and it provides action points for them and so we know that everyone is on the same page.

Q: What are the long-term benefits for the club investing time into players off-field?

A: It's the focus of the board, and (chairman) Paul Tyrrell

“ I get a buzz out of doing it and I've been lucky enough off the field that I've found my niche in life that I've enjoyed

in particular. If we can help these guys settle off the ground and keep them in the Territory, obviously that is going to have a positive effect in keeping the guys around to play for the Territory Thunder.

Someone like Narby Kelly, who has come up from Swan Hill to play for the Tiwi Bombers, he might not have stayed up here to play for Thunder but now he has a job with ISIS as a building cadet

and they are very much looking for him to progress through into project management and working with the national company. Not only does Narby stay around here for a while to play for Thunder but the opportunity is there for him to travel around Australia and work in different sorts of roles.

There are plenty of opportunities up here in the Northern Territory.

Q: Personally, is this the line of work that you want to do after your playing days are over?

A: Definitely. I have a passion to work in the player welfare side of things.

I get a buzz out of doing it and I've been lucky enough off the field that I've found my niche in life that I've enjoyed — and that's helping players find out what they want to do. I've enrolled in uni to do a graduate diploma in psychology so it has been an interest for me for a while.