

# Bewick says Cats bagged a 'bargain'

**TOBY PRIME**

OUT goes Kroeger and in comes Kroeger.

Geelong parted ways with Nathan Kroeger during the trade period but has gained a "bargain" in Flynn Kroeger, the unassuming Yarra Valley boy who did not know about the talent pathway to the AFL. "I just thought you went from playing local footy and senior footy and went into the draft or the clubs just came to you," Kroeger said as the Cats paraded out this year's draftees.

"I had no idea about NAB League or anything like that."

The 183cm midfielder has been limited in the past two years because of Covid and injury but was taken with pick 48 in last week's draft.

Two-time Essendon premiership player Darren Bewick who worked with Kroeger at Rowville Secondary College and Eastern Ranges, said he believed Kroeger had a future at the highest level.

Bewick said Kroeger had impressed with his uncompromising approach, skills on both sides of his body and determination. He also said his penetrating kick could make him a "real weapon".

"He's desperate to make it," Bewick said. "He's certainly got all the attributes. It would've been interesting to see what might have happened had he had a full crack at it."

I reckon they might've got

**“I RECKON THEY MIGHT’VE GOT A LITTLE BIT OF A BARGAIN WHERE THEY ACTUALLY GOT HIM.”**

DARREN BEWICK, PICTURED

a little bit of a bargain where they actually got him. Hopefully it turns out that way."

Kroeger debuted in the NAB League with Eastern as a 15-year-old midway through 2019 and said Geelong had shown interest in his talent since then.

But his development has been punctuated by repeated hip injuries.

Two years ago, he fractured his left hip "just kicking the footy at school", which was followed by hip flexor injuries on both sides of his body.

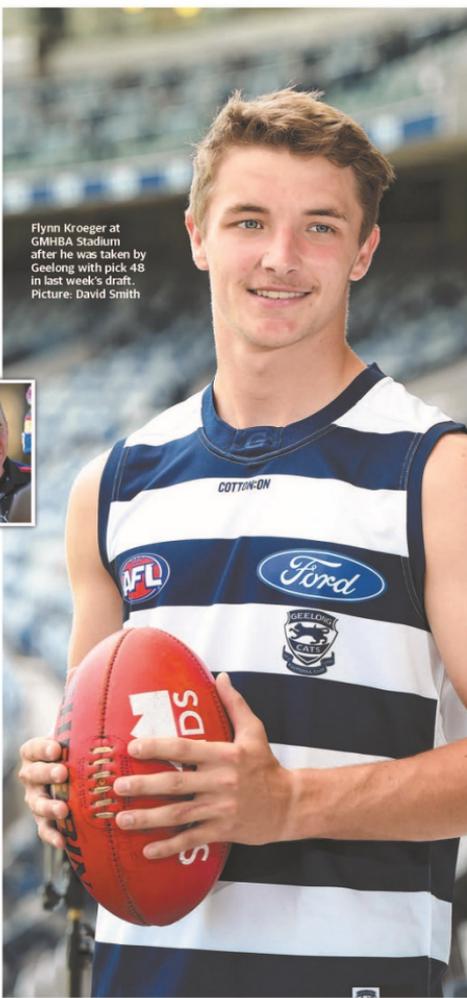
"I haven't really had the best run, but they're good as gold now," Kroeger said. AFL talent ambassador Kevin Sheehan dubbed him "the absolute diamond in the rough" of the national draft.

Bewick said clubs had shown late interest in Kroeger.

"It wasn't just one club, it was starting to become five, six, of which three were really interested, which was weird."

"He's got attributes to suggest that he can be successful at the next level."

Flynn Kroeger at GMHBA Stadium after he was taken by Geelong with pick 48 in last week's draft. Picture: David Smith



## James's joy over draft call

**LACHE YOUNG**

GEELONG youngster James Willis has conceded he thought his draft hopes were dashed after suffering a late-season knee injury this year.

The Cats ultimately backed in the South Australian talent (pictured), taking him with pick 32 – their third selection after local pair Toby Conway and Mitch Knevitt.

Willis, who hails from North Adelaide in the SANFL, spent Wednesday's session at Deakin Oval away from the main group running laps, but said he was hopeful of being ready to tackle the bulk of pre-season after Christmas.

"One hundred per cent I thought that was my hopes down the drain (when he injured his knee) but once I heard my name, I was so excited," Willis said. "It will be more post-Christmas (when he returns to proper training). I am not too sure how long it will be exactly but after Christmas some time will be when I start getting back into it."

Willis had multiple consultations with medics on his troublesome knee throughout 2021 and has undergone assessments at Geelong since arriving at the club.

He will now continue his lighter fitness and rehab program when the Cats senior cohort returns to the track next Monday.

"The injury kept me out for quite a bit of the end of the season," he said.

"My knee just got sore a little bit and I went to the physio and they thought it was just some damage, but then my last game I landed on it weirdly and it hurt really badly."

"I couldn't walk so I went back and went for a scan, and that didn't show much, so they said to have an arthroscopy and once they went in and had a look they found a meniscal tear, some cartilage damage and a little bit of ACL damage."

"It is still a bit sore but I am getting there."

