

# Old head, young shoulders

An ankle injury early in the third quarter of the 2008 grand final, 20 minutes from hell in the bowels of the MCG and a pre-season with plenty of challenges have given Clinton Young some maturing moments in recent months, writes **Emma Quayle**.

**I**N THE almost-deserted Hawthorn change rooms underneath the MCG, Clinton Young could still hear the noise. It would rise, then dip, then almost burst through the walls. Trapped below with the club physios, he had absolutely no idea what twists and turns the game was taking.

When Young's ankle twisted underneath him in a tackle, five minutes into the third quarter of the 2008 grand final, his side was three points in front of Geelong. The match was close, it felt tense, and the wingman had no sense that it was soon to swing Hawthorn's way.

But while he was in the rooms — staring miserably at his badly swollen ankle, hoping it would somehow squeeze back into his boot — Gary Ablett scored on the run, then a dashing Chance Bateman passed to Lance Franklin, and the Hawks snatched back the lead.

As the physios started trying to strap his ankle, Cameron Mooney missed a shot, Michael Osborne's quick handball found a more accurate Luke Hodge and Cyril Rioli took two players on near the boundary line, dragging Max Rooke to the ground while still on his knees.

As Young was coming to terms with the realisation his day was over, feeling frustrated and sick, Rioli bounded into the goalsquare and scored. Bateman missed a running shot and Stuart Dew turned a semi-circle and snapped his first goal. Two minutes later, Dew threaded a second. In the space of just 15 minutes, Hawthorn was 30 points up.

All Young heard, however, was the soundtrack — the cheering, the moans — all impossible to interpret.

As he hobbled back up the race and out into the sunlight — telling himself to stay positive and not drag down anyone's mood — he looked immediately for the scoreboard to find out what he had missed. In an instant, his mood took a huge leap.

"I had all this frustration and in a second it just turned to feeling happy, pretty much," he told *The Sunday Age*.

"I was in the rooms for 20 or 25

minutes and I was just sitting there feeling so annoyed and frustrated, not really knowing what to do. I was thinking about the injury, first of all, and when I realised I wasn't getting back out there, I was thinking about the crowd and the game and wondering what was going on. I just wanted to get back out there and find out.

"My ankle swelled up straight away, so I pretty much knew that I wasn't coming back. But we tried our best to get it going again and that whole time you're hearing all the cheering and feeling like there's nothing you can do.

"But there was no way it would take any weight and I was just telling myself not to let it affect me, to go back out and keep my spirits up and support the boys from the bench. That's what I was thinking, what I was telling myself when I walked back out, and then I looked up and saw the score."

It was a strange feeling. "It was such a big relief, not because I thought the game was over, just because it had still been so tight and so close," Young said.

"I got back out and Stuey Dew had just kicked his second goal and we were five goals up. It was weird how quickly my emotions changed."

Young tore ligaments in his ankle in that tackle. It was an injury that didn't need surgery, but required a lot of rest. After the whirlwind that was post-grand final week, the 23-year-old went to Hong Kong for a few days with his teammates, and then back home to Minyip, to spend some time with his parents and brothers and simply to take everything in.

When it came time to train again, Young could run, but not too much. He had to avoid most of the agility work, but still find a way to get fit. It was the first pre-season in five that he had something to work around, consider and manage, and as the summer months unfolded, it challenged him.

"I had to manage my whole pre-season pretty carefully," he said.

"It was pretty limited, because I couldn't do much of the agility stuff. I had to miss out on a lot of the actual training but still try to get a good fit-

ness base, so that was something new to get used to.

"In my first pre-season at the club I had a limited program because I was new to it all, but the last few years have been really good, building up each year. This was the first time I really missed out on that main block.

"I think over time, though, you learn what you have to do to get yourself ready, even if things aren't perfect, and now everything feels fine. I'm in my fifth year now and I know a lot more about what to do and where I have to get to. By the end of the pre-season I was still pretty happy with where I was at. I felt really fit and, overall, it was still a good pre-season. It was just different.

"I tried not to panic about it, you just have to think everything through and make the most of what you can do. By the end of February I felt like I was ready to get a good month of work in."

Today, Young will play his 67th game for Hawthorn. He wants his evolution this year to involve more improvement on his already sharp left-foot kick, and he wants to have more impact on games.

Having spent most of those matches on the wing, he wants to be able to switch to the half-forward or half-back lines during matches, should those be the places that his team needs him to be, and play well there, too.

"I need to do everything a bit better than I have done it," he said. "Each year, I've sort of noticed a progression and, hopefully, I can take another step this year and become a bit more important to the team, play with more influence."

The grand final has helped. When he hurt his ankle, Young had just had his 19th disposal. He had shot off a few deft little handballs to set teammates into space, gone on a few long, fast, bouncing runs and, off six steps, scored a long running goal that put Hawthorn in front for the first time during the second quarter. He was playing a really, really good game.

Now, Young feels involved in an entirely new season. But throughout the pre-season, when he couldn't do everything he wanted to do, he

allowed his mind to drift back. "The whole pre-season, coming back off the ankle, I was trying really hard to find motivation and keep going. At times it was hard and you have to find things that will get you through.

"I did feel a bit frustrated that I didn't get to finish the game and see what could have happened. It doesn't matter now obviously, but at the same time I sort of felt like I showed myself that I can perform in the bigger games. I didn't get to finish it, so I don't know how it would have turned out. And the only thing that matters is we won, but hopefully I get another chance. I sort of feel within myself now that it's something I can do."

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CLINTON YOUNG



PICTURE: KEN IRWIN

## A second Young has a run on the 'G

**C**LINTON Young was six when his brother Lachlan was born with Down syndrome. He and his other brothers — Gavin, Jarrod and Mitchell — understood that the new arrival would consume much of their parents' attention and that life would change a little. But brothers are brothers, and getting a new one was good.

"At a young age, I knew Lachlan was pretty special, and all we wanted to do as his brothers was look after him and I guess make sure that he got the opportunities to do what he

wanted to do," said the Hawthorn wingman, who also has another younger brother, 13-year-old Blake.

"When you have a lot of brothers, you all just go along with each other and protect each other. We all just loved him from the start. He was the spark of our family and just like any other kid — just one of the boys kicking the footy around in the backyard.

"Some things in your life have to change, I suppose, and we knew he had to be a priority for our parents, but like I said, he was just our brother. Everyone's always loved Lachlan; whether he was down at the footy or

at school he always had a good time with everyone.

"We always looked out for him, but we never had to worry about him not being accepted, or anything like that. We grew up in a good town and everybody loves him."

Lachlan, who helped Clinton break his 50th game hamper last year, is a regular at Hawthorn games and a big fan of Hawks captain Sam Mitchell. He made sure he got around to see all the players in the rooms after last year's grand final win.

After playing some junior footy, Lachlan had to give it away, but on Thursday night came his chance to

line up on the MCG. He played for the Ringwood Spiders against the Mazonod Panthers during half-time of the Collingwood-Geelong match to raise awareness for a competition for people with intellectual disabilities run by the Football Integration Development Association. It involves about 400 people playing football in teams across the state.

FIDA also runs a Friday night football program, which gives young people with Down syndrome the weekly opportunity to help out the AFL umpires at games, passing lollies around in the rooms and handing them their water bottles, for instance.

Clinton Young, in the rooms as part of the support team this time, said it was a big occasion for his family. "It's a really good thing for all of us," he said. "Lachlan's always loved going to the footy and seeing his brothers play, whether it's back home or down here now. He loves walking into the rooms at Hawthorn and seeing all the boys. I think he loves me being at Hawthorn and being able to experience it, so I'm glad I've been able to involve him a bit. He goes all right himself, he's not a bad kick, and getting to play out on the 'G is huge for him."

EMMA QUAYLE

Lachlan Young at the MCG on Thursday night.



Clinton Young in last year's grand final.

PICTURE: PAUL ROVERE