



Ringwood Spiders football team, player Luke Dawson at training. Frank Sullivan (top centre) has helped out with the team for more than 10 years.

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Spiders have footy passion

Catherine Toffolon

WITH the enthusiasm of AFL football rookies the Ringwood Spiders take the field each week – but it's not winning or losing that counts, it's playing a game they all love.

The Spiders, one of 14 teams that compete in the Football Integration Development Association (FIDA) competition, began in 1992 to cater for players with a mild to moderate intellectual disability.

Centre mid-fielder, Luke Dawson, 21, has kicked around Jubilee Park with the Spiders for two years and said the social aspect kept

him keen. "I've met a lot of new friends and I love getting involved, they're a good bunch of people," Dawson said.

"We do drills, handballs, sit ups and running – I love getting fit and I love footy."

Coach, Clinton Fullgrabe said many of the mixed team's 22 players, aged 15 to 50, had been involved since the side's inception.

"The competition provides an opportunity for everyone who is passionate about football to come and get involved regardless of their ability," Mr Fullgrabe said.

"The club is able to cater for all community members as we have very broad and diverse

participation opportunities available. It also provides great social connections and networks, where many of the players have become mates away from the club."

Mr Fullgrabe said sports like football provided the opportunity for players to build their self esteem, make new friends and learn about team work.

FIDA spokesman, Darcy Lyon, said the start of the 2008 season saw more than 400 players in metropolitan and country regions of Victoria. He said the association initiated access to footy for people with an intellectual disability.

"We encourage existing community groups to include people with an intellectual disability in their clubs," Mr Lyon said.

"We promote integration to sport providing to encourage a receptive environment which will accommodate the needs of people with an intellectual disability."

Mr Fullgrabe said the club recently began a player sponsorship initiative, where a player would receive \$150 for the season sponsored by a local business or community member. He said the club was always looking for more players and club sponsors.

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