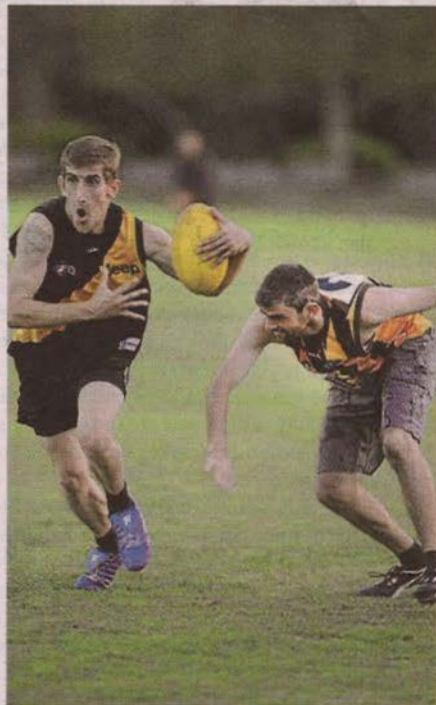


Spider web catches plenty



On the run: Ringwood Spiders footballer Roy jinks past teammate Michael during a training session.

BY YESSAR DAOU

WHAT started out as an all-abilities football side in Ringwood has become a magnet for players.

Ringwood Spiders Sports Club had 15 members when it first took the field in 1992. The number is now closer to 100.

Chairman and head coach Clinton Fullgrabe looks back to the club's 2009 premiership as one of the greatest achievements he's been involved in.

"To see the excitement on the players and their parents' faces . . . not many have achieved anything like this."

Ringwood is one of 18 sides in the Football Integration Development Association, which was formed to provide an Australian Rules program for people with mild to medium intellectual disabilities.

Teams play 10 rounds from April to August, when the grand final is held.

Matches, involving 15 players on each side, are adjusted to four 15-minute quarters.

Although participation and enjoyment are the most important aspects, the coach says that doesn't stop players getting competitive.

"It's predominantly about participation.

We're not playing for sheep stations," Fullgrabe says.

"It's about fun and playing with your mates.

"The clubs are important in reinforcing that, but when they get past the white line everyone wants to win."

Based at Jubilee Park in Ringwood, the Spiders are more than just a football side.

"We established a netball program last year and also have a junior development squad for kids six to 14. We run programs with community fitness company Studio Glo as well."

Training sessions aren't much different from those followed by any other side, with fitness, technique and enjoyment all integral.

"A lot of it's based on skills development and creating a fun, safe sporting environment.

"Many of them haven't played sports before; we try to keep it as fun as possible.

"It's mostly a vehicle to get them involved in the community and give them networks."

Off the field, the club joins in every Clean Up Australia Day and enjoys social activities and fund-raisers. All part of the reason, Fullgrabe feels, that Ringwood Spiders are an



Warm-up: Tom and his Ringwood Spiders teammates stretch before a training session.

Picture: Rob Casew

important element of Maroondah. "We're the only all-abilities club in Maroondah and pride ourselves on being able to give people the chance to be part of a grassroots club.

"We like to engage people who are disconnected. In a number of cases we've had people in social isolation, without jobs. Getting involved changed all that."

The club is always looking for more players and volunteers. If interested, visit ringwoodspiders.com or phone Fullgrabe on 0425 818 590.

To see more pics from the Spiders' training session go to maroondahweekly.com.au