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## Making waves: decision time for AFL's newest draft buddy



ALEX COPPEL

Alpha male ... AFL draft star Jamarra Ugle-Hagan cools off at Melbourne's Brighton Beach on Tuesday

### COURTNEY WALSH

Jamarra Ugle-Hagan brushed off the tag of being branded the next Buddy Franklin with an ease the Western Bulldogs are hoping the young star will bounce off defenders in years to come.

The 18-year-old, who hails from the western districts of Victoria, is acknowledged as the best young footballer in the land.

Barring a selection surprise, Ugle-Hagan will be chosen as the number one choice in the AFL national draft on Wednesday night. It would make him the first Indigenous footballer selected with the top pick since Fremantle chose Des Headland in 1999.

The teenager has been described as an agile, speedy and skilful forward capable of winning matches off his own left boot. Sound familiar? Several

pundits including the AFL's long-serving youth talent manager Kevin Sheehan have likened him in build and manner to Franklin, Sydney's superstar.

Ugle-Hagan rates the comparison as a compliment. But he said comparisons were "just words at the end of the day". "I've got to show my own X-factor on the field and off the field," he said. "I just use it as a drive, and obviously, hopefully, I get there

one day. It is good to have other people believing that I can."

Whether Ugle-Hagan is selected with the top pick is a matter of semantics. A Western Bulldogs junior academy member, the club has the first rights to him. The question is whether Adelaide, which holds the number one pick opt to make the Bulldogs pay a higher price by calling his name.



# Clubs flying blind in hunt for young guns

COURTNEY WALSH  
AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL

The crystal-ball abilities of the AFL's talent scouts will be tested more than ever before in an unprecedented national draft today as clubs plot late strategic moves.

The pandemic has produced a scenario where recruiters will select key talents effectively sight unseen due to the lack of junior football played in Victoria.

Jamarra Ugle-Hagan, who will become a Western Bulldog, has been assessed as the best young talent in the land.

But the key forward, who hails from the Western Districts of Victoria, is among the prospects who did not play a match this year.

Draft experts predict up to five of the top ten selections in the national draft, who will be hyped as stars for which success-starved clubs can build around, could hail from Victoria.

Recruiters have pored over vision of those players competing in junior levels from years previous.

They have also made assessments of their athletic ability, based on a recent draft combine, and will use psychological profiles when gambling which teenagers will become AFL champions.

Richmond's success in an abridged season effectively removed an asterisk associated with the 2020 premiership given their dominance in recent years.

But there is no doubt the draft pool for this season is compro-



ALEX COPPEL

Jamarra Ugle-Hagan, left, at Brighton Beach in Melbourne

mised given the challenges created by coronavirus.

It is impossible to assess the match development of the Victorian teenagers considering they did not play a game this year.

The lack of a national underage carnival also diminishes the ability of recruiters to judge how potential draftees compare from state to state.

Given border restrictions prevented senior recruiters from moving around Australia, clubs have placed greater reliance on their talent scouts based in Perth and Adelaide, for example.

Perhaps the only certainty of the draft, which will be held for the first time as a virtual format due to COVID-19, is that Ugle-Hagan will become a Bulldog.

But whether Ugle-Hagan,

## Recruiters will select key talents effectively sight unseen this year

who has been compared to Sydney superstar Lance Franklin, is selected with pick one is among the gambits in question.

The Crows holds the top draft pick tonight but are yet to reveal their hand when it comes to the talent from Framlingham.

Adelaide was awaiting last-minute medical assessments before deciding on their approach to the prized No.1 selection.

Should they select Ugle-Hagan, the Bulldogs will be forced to combine draft selections in order to match their bid in

terms of draft points, which effectively equates to paying a higher price.

But after a season in which they claimed the wooden spoon for the first time, the Crows may decide it is better to have the No.1 pick, which carries significant prestige, playing for them, recruiting manager Hamish Ogilvie said this week.

They are weighing up the merits of selecting local forward-ruckman Riley Thilthorpe, Western Australian Logan McDonald or Elijah Holland instead.

"There are a number of reasons why you should and why you shouldn't, so we will weigh that up," Ogilvie told SEN.

"The other thing is that maybe the Bulldogs are going to pick the same player as we are later in the draft, so if they don't have those points, maybe they can't."

There are several academy talents rated as top 30 prospects, which could see a significant alteration to the draft order should rival clubs opt to bid for them.

It is also possible clubs will opt to swap draft choices with their rivals for strategic purposes.

A report yesterday suggested North Melbourne, which has the second selection in the draft, could agree to a swap with Hawthorn, which has pick four, in live trading.

This would give the Hawks access to McDonald, should he be available, ahead of the Swans, which have the third pick.