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PREMIUM NEWS

## On the Grapevine

By **Barb Love**  
Sep 4, 2023

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*Familiar faces: Jy Simpkin, Cade Beasley, Sam Birrell and Shane Crawford at CFC Photo by Barb Love*

### Juniors train with AFL greats

**AFL and Hawthorn legend Shane Crawford lifted the confidence of Cobram’s Under 14 and Under 17 sides when he attended their training session last week in preparation for their finals campaign.**

Joining him was talented North Melbourne co-captain Jy Simpkin and former schoolmate and fellow boarder at Assumption College, Federal Member for Nicholls Sam Birrell.

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While some of the younger footballers may not have heard of Mr Crawford, they certainly know Mr Simpkin, a talented footballer gaining recognition as a club leader while only in his mid-20s.

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Cobram's junior footballers listened intently to the footballing pair at training. They relished an opportunity to be in the same room as the AFL duo when they spoke to the crowd in the clubrooms afterwards and shared a meal with supporters, parents and junior players.



Assumption boys: Sam Birrell, Cade Beasley, Ben Kennedy and Shane Crawford catch up. Photo by Barb Love

Mr Crawford played 305 games with Hawthorn after having played all his junior football in Finley where he and his two brothers grew up.

Mr Crawford debuted for Hawthorn in 1993, after being draft pick 13 in 1991. He captained Hawthorn from 1999 to 2004 and won the Brownlow Medal in 1999. He went on to win four best and fairest awards at Hawthorn, in 1998, 1999, 2002 and 2003.

He was a member of Hawthorn's 2008 premiership side.

Mr Crawford, 48, has undeniably been a marketer's dream with his good looks, engaging smile and cheeky sense of humour. He treats everyone he meets with respect, both young and old, and was hugely popular for many years on *The Footy Show*, before and after retiring from the game.

Mr Crawford has four sons: Charlie, 17, Ben, 14, who is showing some of his dad's footy talent, and twins Jack and Harry, 11.

The footballer's visit to Cobram Football Club was instigated by committee man Cade Beasley, who boarded at Assumption College with Crawford and Mr Birrell, and the trio have been mates ever since.

They enjoyed a great catch-up, the first time they had been together at CFC since 1992 when Cade celebrated his 21st birthday.



Mr Crawford brought along his much-adored mum, Dianne Crawford, who still lives in Finley and is well known to people throughout the region as the hard-working and proud mother of three sons, Shane, Andrew and youngest son Justin, who sadly passed away in 2022.



*Mother and son: Shane Crawford and beloved mum Dianne at CFC. Photo by Barb Love*

Mr Simpkin, 25, was born in Mooroopna and completed his secondary education at Scotch College through the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation Scholarship program.

He was North Melbourne's draft pick 12 in 2016 and has played 134 games as a midfielder while winning the Syd Barker Medal for best and fairest in 2021 and 2022. This year he was appointed co-captain of the side.

Mr Birrell does not have a football profile; however, he loves the game and in his role as Member for Nicholls, based in Shepparton, is keen to visit as many sporting clubs and groups in the region as he can, getting to know his constituents and discussing their current status and concerns.

Before entering politics, Mr Birrell was an agronomist after attaining a degree in agricultural science, followed by his MBA. He later was appointed chief executive of the Committee for Greater Shepparton.

Assumption College was the catalyst for boarders Mr Crawford, Mr Birrell and Mr Beasley to become lifelong friends, and the evening at Cobram Football Club provided an opportunity for a rare catch-up in a familiar family-friendly environment.

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