YOUNG BLOODS

By Steve Barrett

Promising West Adelaide midfielder Will Snelling could be forgiven for feeling a tad starstruck when he lined up on Adelaide Crows star Scott Thompson in a trial match earlier this year.

The 17-year-old Snelling, a Year 12 student at Mercedes College, was just three years old when the decorated Thompson made his AFL debut.

It took a bit of work to focus on the job at hand.

“When I played on Scott Thompson, it was surreal - the size of him, the way he went about it,” Snelling said.

“Earlier this season I spent time running with Mitch Grigg and Matt Crouch and then against Sturt. Kane Kirkwood was getting off the chain so I had to chop-out and help shut him down.

“Playing on those big names, you’re not supposed to be mesmerised, but it is exciting.”

Snelling has established himself as an integral part of the rejuvenated Bloods’ midfield since his Powerade Star Search nomination on debut against Woodville-West Torrens in Round 2, when he collected 18 disposals and nine tackles.

“What I like about the club is the relationships between the coaches, the medical staff and the players.”

“It’s been great fun,” said Snelling, who was first spotted by former West coach Andy Collins, who attended the youngster’s SAPSASA games in Year 6 and 7.

“Everything you see, at the game, at training, is a new opportunity to grow and develop my skills.

“I was lucky to be fast-tracked with some spots opening up this season, it’s been really good contributing in the middle. Guys like Chris Schmidt get tagged every week so it makes it a bit easier for the guys like me.

“SANFL is a massive jump from school and reserves footy - the physicality, the communication on the ground, reading the game... it feels like there’s no time.”

Team-mate Hugh Haysman, six months older and a 2014 Mercedes graduate, made his debut the same day as Snelling - in the Bloods’ stunning come-from-behind win over the Eagles - and vividly recalls the education he received that day.

“I had a defensive role on Matt Goldsworthy which was interesting because I’d never played that tagging role before,” said Haysman, whose father Tim was a fine Grade cricketer for Sturt and won the 2001/02 Bradman Medal.

“Getting to follow him around the ground was pretty cool.

“Without knowing it, he actually helped me with knowing where to go and reading the play.

“I don’t think he knew who I was.

“It’s a whole new level - the pace of the game is incredible.”

Like his father, Haysman junior was blessed with cricket ability but when it came time to make the decision between his two favourite sports, there was only ever one option.

“I played a lot of cricket through school, was first XI at Mercedes and played for Sturt,” he said.

“I fractured my foot after getting hit by a yorker at the start of year 12 and ended up in a moonboot.

“Twinning cricket but I had to give it up because I loved footy even more.”

“It takes a special kind of love to enjoy pounding the pavements during Adelaide’s stinking hot summer months. Haysman caught an early glimpse of the standards required during West’s well-documented arduous pre-season.

“Coming off a disappointing 2014, we had a full-on pre-season where the boys worked really hard,” said Haysman, who is studying commerce at Adelaide University.

“I definitely feel as fit as I’ve ever been.

“I was lucky enough to play a few reserves games which gave me some insight to what it (senior level) would be like.

“What I like about the club is the relationships between the coaches, the medical staff and the players.

“Everyone gets on really well and all feedback and criticism is taken on board.”

The bond between the young pair, who both harbour AFL aspirations, is obvious.

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“Will and I have become good mates,” said half-forward/wingman Haysman, who was the Powerade Star Search nominee a week after Snelling.

“In the Bloods’ Round 3 win over the Crows, I was a year above him at school, we play footy together and do pretty much everything together.

“Will’s facing the challenge of balancing year 12 with playing in the SANFL.

“He’s working hard and putting the hours in.”

For Snelling, 2015 was never going to be a picnic.

“I knew before the start of the season it would be challenging,” he said.

“But my mum, dad, brother and sister have all been very supportive.”

Haysman is a Brisbane Lions and Simon Black fan while Snelling, who grew up in the Bloods zone as a Westies supporter while his father (Norwood) and mother (Glenelg) had opposing allegiances, has always idolised Essendon and James Hird.

“That’s not their only difference of opinion.

“Will is pretty straight and narrow but he definitely loves the gym, for sure,” Haysman said.

“The younger Snelling, with a laugh, gets the last word.

“Hugh’s a bit of a mirror magnet... I’m surprised he can even see me at the gym.”