

Rising soccer star is picked for Japanese tour

By Jess Gledhill

PADDY Mathers has soccer running through his veins.

The 14-year-old Moama Anglican Grammar student can't get enough of it — which is lucky considering he's about to spend eight days playing overseas.

Mathers was selected into the under 14 Victorian Regional Representative Squad to tour Japan this month, taking on representative teams from different regions.

A team of 37 players were chosen for the under 13 and 14 squad.

Mathers was one of five representatives from Bendigo City Football Club (BCFC), where he plays in the National Premier League (NPL) under 14 side, to take part in the country state trials in Melbourne.

All five BCFC made it into the final squad and four of them would head to Tokyo on August 14 to start the tour along with a head coach, two assistant

coaches, a team manager, a team physio and a translator who would meet them over there.

Mathers has played for City for three years, training three nights a week and playing in either Melbourne, Bendigo, Geelong or Ballarat on weekends.

His mother Yvonne joked about becoming a full-time chauffeur between driving Mathers and his two siblings around for their sport.

Before that he'd spent a year with Golden City in the Bendigo Amateur Soccer League (BASL).

He started as a junior with the Moama Echuca Border Raiders, having taken up soccer at five-years-old, and dedicates much of his time to the sport.

He said it was a challenge stepping up to the NPL and he had learnt a lot from his coach Marcus Dawson.

"You can learn a lot from your opponents as well," he said.

"Our coach does a lot of game analysis and gives us individual goals to work on.

"At the moment I'm working on reading the play up the field and have moved into right-back to learn that role and about overlapping to the right wing."

Mathers technical approach to the game was enough to catch the eyes of Football Federation Victoria (FFV) selectors at Melbourne.

He was hand-picked by his BCFC coach to go down for trials and knew once he saw his competition he had to step up his game.

"I wasn't really sizing anyone else up when I got there, I was more focused on my own game," he said.

"I definitely stepped up my game when I saw the other kids though and started to play better — the skill level was extraordinary.

"The coaches in Melbourne were

incredibly helpful and told us what we needed to work on straight away."

The team will have one practice match against another NPL side before heading off overseas.

Mathers said he would want to pursue soccer as a career and if not as a player in some way of sports science.

"Anything to do with soccer really," he said.

"Something where I won't have to sit at a desk all day."

Yvonne made sure to remind her son about needing a degree before thinking of being a professional soccer player.

Mathers wouldn't have gotten this far without the support of his parents and now the community with Moama Bowling Club helping to sponsor his Japan trip.

Mathers thanked the Moama Bowling Club and sales and marketing manager George Santos for backing him in his sporting goals.

"We (Moama Bowling Club) thought it appropriate to sponsor Paddy," Mr Santos said.

"We're always looking to support young people in all areas, whether it be sport or otherwise.

"We wouldn't want anyone to miss out on a chance to progress in their chosen field purely for financial reasons."

It would be Mathers' first time travelling overseas on his own and it was all self-funded with a total cost for flights, accommodation, meals and training and walk out kits.

He isn't new to representative teams, having been selected in the Victorian under 12 and 13 sides in 2014 and 2015 to play in the national championships, and in summer he still played indoor soccer in Bendigo.

The next step was to trial again for possible selection into the Victorian team to play in Coffs Harbour this November.