

Cats favourites to sign Dangerfield

STEVE LARKIN

PATRICK Dangerfield has confirmed he's leaving Adelaide and wants to play for a Victorian-based AFL club.

Geelong is favoured to win Dangerfield's services and have reportedly offered the brilliant midfielder a long-term contract.

"Whilst disappointing, we understand that Patrick's decision has been made for personal reasons," Adelaide's chief executive Andrew Fagan said in a statement.

"We will now consider our options. However, our members and supporters should rest assured that in doing so we will make decisions and take action that is in the best interests of our football club."

The announcement ends season-long speculation that the brilliant midfielder was seeking to play for Geelong, located near his family home of Moggs Creek. Dangerfield told Adelaide's players of his decision yesterday.

Geelong has reportedly offered Dangerfield, 25, a five-

year contract worth about \$800,000 a season.

Dangerfield has fallen off contract with Adelaide, but having been on the Crows' list for eight seasons, is categorised as a restricted free agent.

That means the Crows are entitled to match Geelong's offer – but no other club in AFL history has opted to match a free agency offer.

Adelaide is believed to favour matching Geelong's offer, which would then force the Cats to strike a trade deal.

If the Crows opt not to

match the offer, compensation for Dangerfield would be decided by the AFL and likely be a first-round draft selection which Adelaide deem unsuitable compensation.

The other option, considered unlikely, is that Dangerfield nominates for the pre-season draft, stating he wants to play for Geelong and no one else, and nominates his salary.

But that scenario is high-risk as other clubs with pre-season draft selections before Geelong could call his bluff and match the salary offer.

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ADELAIDE BOSS
ANDREW FAGAN



MOVING ON: Patrick Dangerfield.

Picture: SARAH REED

Gunston grounding blow

Injury rules out Hawks marksman

ROGER VAUGHAN

HAWTHORN have ruled out Jack Gunston for their AFL preliminary final against Fremantle, conceding three days out that he will not be ready.

While the forward has made progress in his recovery from an ankle injury, the Hawks have given up on trying to bring him back against the Dockers.

Gunston, Hawthorn's leading goalkicker this season with 53, suffered the injury in the last quarter of their qualifying final loss to West Coast and this will be his second week out of action. Hawks football manager Chris Fagan said Gunston had pulled up well from training, but still had not done enough to justify the risk.

"We decided this morning he hasn't quite made enough progress to warrant his selection," Fagan told the club website. "We're happy with how he's improved, but we don't think he's quite at the level yet where he could play in a big final." The Hawks remain hopeful that, should they beat the Dockers, Gunston could return for the grand final.

While Gunston's continued absence is a blow, otherwise the Hawks are in good shape for the preliminary final.

They rebounded strongly from a poor loss to West Coast, belting Adelaide last Friday night in their semi-final.

Star Hawks midfielder Jordan Lewis added they would be better prepared this time for the Domain Stadium cauldron.

He admitted on Wednesday that the Hawks had not handled the hostile Perth crowd well in the loss to the Eagles.

"It's pretty vivid in our memories that we were probably intimidated, a little bit, to be honest, by the crowd," Lewis said. "But we've learnt a lot of lessons from that game and hopefully we prepare ourselves a little bit differently for the crowd this time."

Lewis noted their last two



SORE POINT: Hawks sharpshooter Jack Gunston will miss the preliminary final against Freo due to an ankle injury. Picture: GETTY IMAGES

matches before the West Coast game were low-key wins over Brisbane and Carlton.

"We've played in big games a lot in recent years," he said.

"But it was probably the two games leading into the finals, the crowd wasn't as big and it wasn't as vocal.

"It shouldn't have come as a

shock, but we probably weren't ready for it and we probably got overawed by it a little bit. That was a really good lesson for us to learn – we didn't play our best football and the crowd was probably a key factor."

Lewis was among six Hawks who flew to Perth on Wednesday a day early for the

preliminary final. Captain Luke Hodge, Shaun Burgoyne, Jarryd Roughead and Isaac Smith also went ahead of their teammates, along with emergency Jonathon Ceglar.

Fremantle have their own injury concerns, with star on-baller Nat Fyfe admitting an ongoing leg injury is a nuisance.

But Lewis said Fyfe remained a big threat.

"Nat Fyfe at 80 per cent is still obviously a really dangerous player," Lewis said.

"You can't go into the mindset of just targeting players, because you get a bit overawed by that and a bit consumed by that."

Victory in mind for Roos

ROGER VAUGHAN

NORTH Melbourne are underdogs with a low growl, confident that their bite is sharp enough to put them into the AFL grand final.

Kangaroos coach Brad Scott is talking up his team's prospects ahead of the daunting challenge of Saturday's preliminary final against West Coast in Perth.

He said North are motivated by a quiet resolve to improve on last year, when they lost badly to Sydney at the same stage, and they are in the best physical shape they have been all season.

Hawthorn midfielder Jordan Lewis admitted his side was intimidated by the Domain Stadium crowd in their qualifying final loss to the Eagles. Scott predicted his players would feed off that atmosphere.

Scott added Drew Petrie and Robbie Tarrant should also be fit to play.

He has admitted that 12 months ago, North subconsciously were maybe content just to make a preliminary final.

"This year we have a quiet confidence about what we're doing," he said.

"We really have an expectation, rather than hope.

"While we've been happy with our wins the last couple of weeks, it certainly hasn't been over the top.

"It's certainly been with an eye to next week and an eye that we still have a couple of steps to take."

The Kangaroos controversially rested a large group of players in round 23 and Scott said they are now seeing the benefits of that.

"We've already managed it," he said of finals fatigue.

When told of Lewis' comments, Scott expressed surprise that anything would intimidate the Hawks.