



Participants were put through their paces at the two NGA Draft Combines in June and July.

Photo: Riley Lockett

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South Sudanese talent shines at Next Generation Academy Draft Combine

Two Next Generation Academy (NGA) Draft Combines have taken place in Victoria for the first time, with more than 60 aspiring South Sudanese players showcasing their talents.

A joint initiative between the AFL and NextGen Unite (NGU), the Victorian combines spread across two regions in June and July, with the first hosted at Eagles Stadium in the west and the second taking place in South Dandenong on Wednesday evening.

The invitation-only event provided 13 to 23-year-old boys, girls, men and women the opportunity to potentially secure a position on an NGA list by showcasing their skills and ability, and also undertaking physical testing.

Testing was conducted by Rookie Me, the same company who also coordinates testing for the AFL and AFLW combine programs.

The combines also provided career development opportunities for all participants and included presentation training to help upskill players and ensure they are equipped with additional skills to highlight their diverse range of talents off the field too. Their families were also able to attend an information session too – hearing about the talent pathway programs and all the ways children can connect to the game.

The inaugural NGA combines aim to boost pathways, grow talent pools and provide opportunities for multicultural players to be drafted into the elite competitions.

There are 11 Sudanese players on AFL lists across the country in 2024, including the Bulldogs' Buku Khamis, Hawthorn's Changkuoth Jiath, Giants' Leek Aleer, Port's Aliir Aliir, as well as Tew Jiath (Collingwood) and Luamon Lual (Essendon) who are the most recent draftees from 2023 – and both taken within the top 40.

In the AFLW, former Richmond and Hawthorn player Akec Makur Chuot has been a role model for women and girls coming through the system, while Nyakoat Dojiok from North Melbourne's VFLW side and Grace Baba, who is eligible to be drafted this year, continue to take strides in their football careers.



The participants in South Dandenong on Wednesday evening were joined by brothers Changkuoth Jiath from Hawthorn and Tew Jiath from Collingwood. Photo: Riley Lockett

AFL Diversity Manager, Xavier Moloney, said it was exciting to see the players' talents on display.

“These NGA Draft Combines targeting the South Sudanese community is a terrific initiative and I know everyone involved was excited to see what the participants produced across both events and in turn, how we can help support their pathway in footy,” Moloney said.

“There were some solid results across the two combines so it’s great that we can identify this talent and have the potential to develop their skills even further.

“Last year we had two Sudanese players drafted in the top 40, with Tew Jiath heading to Collingwood and Luamon Lual picked up by Essendon. They are both inspirational stories to come out of our NGA multicultural program and now sees 11 Sudanese players contracted to AFL lists.

“In the AFLW Akec Makur Chuot who played for three clubs has led the way, and we have prospects coming through such as Grace Baba from the Eastern Ranges, but we need to continue strengthening and improving pathways for girls, and we’re hoping the combines plays a role in this work.

“I’d like to thank Mamuch and the team at NextGen Unite for all their hard work in pulling these inaugural combines together – they have such a strong connection to their community and are passionate about providing opportunities for the next generation.”

NextGen Unite is a dynamic youth-led non-profit, dedicated to empowering South Sudanese Australians. Through education, mentorship, sports and cultural initiatives, NexGen Unite create transformative opportunities for its community, fostering resilience and unity.

NextGen Unite CEO, Mamuch Chuol, said they were thrilled to partner with the AFL in hosting the two combines.

“We’re delighted to see these inaugural events take place across Victoria and I’d like to thank everyone involved in making these combines possible,” Chuol said.

“It is recognition of what our community has already achieved in the AFL, for both men and women, but perhaps more importantly what is ahead in the future for our community.

“Australian rules footy is perfectly suited to the physical attributes of the South Sudanese people – height, strength, speed, and awesome skills – and I’m pleased this has been on show.”

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