

# Kangas hit schools to search for next gen talent

JAKE FISKEN AND LIAM PHILLIPS

KANGAS Softball Club have gotten proactive in addressing the club's current shortage of junior players, travelling to local Barossa Valley primary schools to promote the sport.

Amanda Unger, head coach of Kangas, said the limited number of young players coming into the game is not limited to just her club.

"It's quite obvious there is a shortage of junior players coming through into our Gawler and District league," she said.

"Every club has been suffering for it."

While traditional 'come and try' days are producing some sign-ups, Unger said "they were still lacking" and needed to get creative about the problem.

With this struggle, the head coach decided to put her best foot forward and find a new avenue of recruiting, going straight to the source.

Unger sent emails out to local Barossa schools proposing a free clinic, and quickly got back six positive RSVPs, including Freeling Primary School, the fourth stop on their local tour.

The idea has already begun to bear fruit, adding three youngsters to their tee-ball program, with plenty of further interest.

Discussing the appeal of softball, Unger highlighted the inclusive nature of the game, and emphasised the importance of "teamwork and having fun".

"It's a really fun sport, and with some quite diverse skills," she said.

"With all the running, catching, throwing and hitting, you're building a wider skill base than a lot of other sports.

"And they get to spend a lot of time with their team-mates – it's a team sport, it's about



Freeling Primary School students Sia Lobrovic and Jaxon Whimpress picked up some new skills at the Kangas softball clinic.

PHOTO: Liam Phillips

community, being together and bringing each other up.

"Softball is also a game that's perfect for players of every size, shape and skill-base. They don't have to be ready-made sports athletes – they can have not played sport at all – but there's always a spot for them."

The season does not resume until October, but pre-season is set to begin in August.

Since the club is zoned in the Barossa region, Barossa locals who are interested in getting involved are encouraged to head to the Kangas Softball Club Facebook page, where there are links to sign up.

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**- AMANDA UNGER**

## Rangers mums step up to the plate

ROBERT LAIDLAW

GAWLER Rangers Baseball Club is in good hands as it ventures into Division One for the first time in the 2023/24 season, with three executive ladies at the helm.

From five members on the executive committee, three are mums of up-and-coming Rangers players who all have a vision of playing at the top level with the club.

Naomi Oxford and Kylie Playfair share secretary duties, while Rebecca Lee is the treasurer – important roles in any sporting club.

While Naomi and Rebecca have been at the club for six years, watching their children progress from tee-ball to under-17s this season, Kylie joined in 2021.

"I think gaining Division One status is a great achievement from all the volunteers over the years, including Darko Filko, Craig Lee and others," Rebecca said.

"My children will be able

to play at that higher level and receive higher level coaching, which they crave, and at the club they have supported for so long.

"I am excited to see the club grow and to be able to attract greater numbers and be competitive in the sport."

Rebecca originally started out helping with the tee-ball, before progressing to scoring, while she has embraced the treasurer's role with aplomb over the past five seasons. Both her sons, Hudson and Murphy, have played representative baseball.

Hudson played in the Marlins charter team, while Murphy competed against Chinese teams at West Beach.

"Watching the kids' development from tee-ball through to juniors, the friends they have made and the love for the game – they are the highlights," she said. "As was the under-15 premiership in 2021/22."

Team manager, pitch counter, canteen manager, uniform coordinator, fundraising and social committee, secretary and registrar are some of the roles Naomi has filled, including as a player for the Rangers women's team.

In 2017, Naomi's son Ross asked his parents if he could play baseball, and it has been a family affair in the sport ever since – including for husband and father Simon, who also plays a major part on the committee.

The 'new kid on the block' as far as being on the executive committee, Kylie has revelled in her new role and enjoys supporting her son Taelon's enjoyment in playing the sport.

"As a parent, I think it is important to keep kids active, and after trying others sports I found that baseball was the sport Taelon had the passion for," she said.

"I volunteered my time and joined the committee to



Gawler Rangers executives Naomi Oxford, Kylie Playfair and Rebecca Lee with sons Ross Oxford, Taelon Playfair, Murphy Lee and Hudson Lee.  
PHOTO: Robert Laidlaw

support with administration duties and to give back to a great club.

"Division One, it is exciting for the club to play

in the top level of the sport. It allows the club to maintain our top players."

The enthusiasm of these wonderful ladies matches

that of their sons, who are all potential Division One baseballers for the Rangers in the not-too-distant future.