

# Opportunity for local gridiron hopefuls

**Mark Robinson**

GRIDIRON

IMAGINE hurling the perfect spiral pass, producing a match winning sack or taking the ball over the end zone for a game changing touch down.

Gridiron, one of the world's most action packed sports is experiencing rapid growth in Victoria and clubs are on the look out for Hamilton players.

With the Ballarat Pioneers entering their first season in the Gridiron Victoria competition, recruiters want to tap the local talent pool.

President, player and founder of the Ballarat Pioneers, Simeon Pantelich, is encouraging anyone interested in hurling the pig skin to join the developing club.

"Anyone and everyone can play," Pantelich said.

"Every size and weight can play.

"We are basically an open slate. There is a junior competition which follows the senior season. At the moment we are just focusing on a senior side but by 2012 we will need a junior team."

The Gridiron Victoria competition consists of eight teams spanning areas which cover Gippsland, Geelong and

Melbourne.

American born Pantelich founded the club in March last year and said it had been growing from strength to strength.

Raising funds, obtaining sponsors and training hard has been the focus for the Pioneers in the lead up to the season opener on May 7.

Currently with about 25 players on the Ballarat based team's list, Pantelich said a further 10 will be needed to cover the many playing positions in gridiron.

While admitting plenty of travel will be involved for Hamilton players, the avid National Football League fan believes the friendships created will make up for it.

"With the travel comes the smack talking and the team bonding," he said.

The passionate president said it was exciting times for the area with the introduction of a new sport.

"The first game will mark the beginning of the first chapter of a new sport in the city and the region," Pantelich said.

Gridiron Victoria president, Dan Levin, said Hamilton could establish its own gridiron club if there was enough interest in the town.

"If the town got behind it, the size of the city is irrelevant," he said.

The steps required in starting a club

would be to gauge interest in the town, learn the game and preferably find a coach with gridiron experience.

Since television sports channel One HD began broadcasting NFL, interest in Australia has been steadily growing for the American sport.

"I think most people who watch the game have always fancied themselves in the sport and been interested in gridiron," Levin said.

The Gridiron Victoria president believes Australians are well suited to the game with international talent scouts impressed by the physical presence Australians play with.

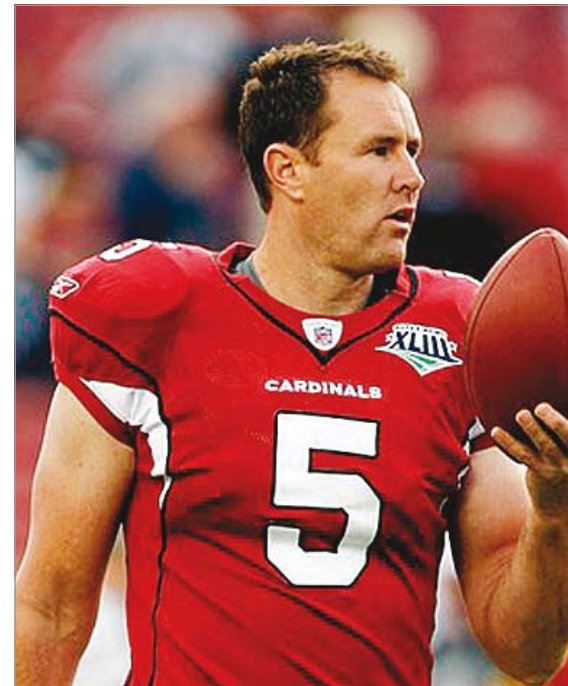
"It provides them with a completely different game," Levin said.

"The thing that they (talent scouts) like is that Australians aren't afraid to hit, they love the physicality of the game."

Gridiron Victoria games are played every Sunday with the season running from May 7 to August 28.

For further information regarding the Ballarat Pioneers contact Simeon Pantelich on 0416 032 724.

To find further information on forming a gridiron team visit [www.gridironvictoria.com.au](http://www.gridironvictoria.com.au).



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