

# A ‘Baker’s Dozen’ of Tasmanian Players at Norwood in 2024

The following story about Norwood’s ‘Tasmanian connection’ of players in 2024, appeared in the Hobart Mercury in the week prior to the 2024 Grand Final versus Glenelg.

## Unpacking the strong Tasmanian connection at Norwood ahead of Redlegs return to SANFL Grand Final

Ahead of the SANFL grand final, amazingly 13 Tasmanians now call Norwood home. Coach Jade Rawlings, the mastermind behind the recruiting drive, explains how it’s aided the Redlegs’ charge towards a flag.



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It’s a connection that’s been brought about by four-simple factors and it’s one Norwood coach Jade Rawlings makes no apologies for.

The proud Tasmanian is set to coach the Redlegs in his second South Australian National Football League (SANFL) grand final on Sunday with his strong contingent of fellow apple islanders playing a crucial role across the course of the season.

Norwood’s reserves side are also locked into their own grand final.

Thirteen players currently on Norwood’s list hail from Rawling’s home state, with his appointment and the recruitment of former Hawthorn draftee Jackson Callow, creating a snowball effect that’s paid dividends for one of Australian football’s most successful clubs.



Rawlings joined Norwood in 2020 following a career in the AFL as both a player and coach. Picture: David Mariuz/SANFL

Speaking to this masthead days out from the clash, the 46-year-old reflected on the impact they'd made with as many as six likely to feature in the senior decider.

"I'm not sure how popular I am in Tassie, given the amount that we have over here, but I don't apologise for creating environments that are going to enable young men to thrive in their footy," Rawlings said.

"I admire our Tasmanian boys for having the courage to move their life through a footy career at second tier level. They make our club better, they're terrific young men and they add to our environment both on-field and off-field.

"To have a second zone, we're strongly zoned in South Australia where we can recruit and access players, but to have a (makeshift) second zone in Tasmania has been a real benefit to our club.

"Jackson was the first one. He blazed the trail for others and progressively over time we've been able to add more Tasmanians along the way. There's probably a balance we need to strike with how many are with us, but they haven't made the club worse, that's for sure."

While some may look at the deep list of Tasmanians at the club and assume the state is an open market, Rawlings stressed that they performed a targeted recruitment process no matter where players originated from.

“I don’t play favourites,” he said.

“Character, age, profile and the capacity to play at the level are the things we look for and it just so happens that these men all have that.

“We don’t do favours for people because someone said their friend wants to come over. The concept of coming over is quite appealing to a lot of people, not everyone follows through with it, which I understand and appreciate, but we do have strong recruiting filters and we haven’t been let down by Tasmania yet.



Tasmanians Jackson Callow, Alec Wright, Baynen Lowe, Jake Cresswell, Mitch O'Neill and Tom Donnelly have all played key roles this season. Picture: Keryn Stevens

“I can’t give promises about the opportunities but I can assure them they’ll get a good program and they’ll enjoy living over in South Australia.

“95 per cent of the guys that have come over have thrived and want to stay for long periods of time, so we’re lucky that I’ve got a point of difference over here being a Tasmanian and the fact that people want to keep pushing to the next level of footy that’s currently the second best rated comp in the

country, but I'm pleased as a club we're open to affording opportunities to young men."

One young man who was offered that opportunity by Rawlings is former Devonport and North Launceston product Baynen Lowe and the midfielder has repaid the faith in spades this season.

Named in the SANFL Team of the Year, Lowe has thrived in 2024 and paid credit to Rawlings' belief in him as a key contributor behind both his initial move and his career-best season.

"I've loved every minute since I've walked through the doors at Norwood," Lowe said.

"Jade was the reason I made that initial move. I'd played some footy with Jackson (Callow) at North Launceston, but that was only probably six months, so the connection for me was through Jade with him also being a Devonport boy.

"The SANFL was the competition I wanted to play in but to have someone in my corner like 'Twig' (Rawlings) to get me over the line, and now playing some good footy, is what's worked really well for me."

Lowe also spent time with current Norwood teammates Tom Donnelly and Oliver Sanders at TSL powerhouse North Launceston, and with his fellow Tasmanian-born teammates all hailing from right across the state, the 21 year-old says the sense of home has ensured they've all formed bonds that wouldn't have likely been possible if they'd chosen to stay at home.

"The move to South Australia is what's probably brought us all closer," he said.

"Having that shared connection of moving away from home and understanding what we've sacrificed is big. The footy club has been great in that respect also but to have more than a handful of other blokes, plus Jade, who can relate to you does play a role in feeling comfortable and playing good football."



Baynen Lowe has become a key figure in Norwood's midfield this season. (SANFL Image/David Mariuz)



While Jackson Callow has been credited for kickstarting the recruitment drive of Tasmanian-born players to Norwood. (SANFL Image/David Mariuz)

With the current contingent of ‘Tassie Redlegs’ all likely to be on the radar of the Tasmania Devils ahead of their entry into the VFL program in 2026, Rawlings is under no illusions how strong the lure of a return home may be.

Especially with an AFL side also on the horizon.

But the former Hawthorn, Western Bulldogs and North Melbourne player is, for the time being, just focused on adding a 32nd premiership to Norwood’s trophy cabinet this weekend.

“I’m pretty realistic that it’ll be alluring for our guys to consider going back,” he said.

“I think a lot of them will make decisions based on how it’s set up. I don’t think they’ll go back just because of Tasmania and the VFL, with all due respect. I think they’ll go based upon the structure and environment that they would be going back to. But I don’t think too far ahead.

“We deal with short-term contracts with our players over here. I just want to keep making sure they’re enjoying themselves as young men and if the footy program is part of that, then great. If it’s not and it’s time to go, then I will be supportive as well.

“When they’re with us, I just want to have all of them emotionally invested and give everything of themselves and if the time comes and it’s time to go back, we’ll understand.”

### **Tasmanian players at Norwood**

Baynen Lowe (Devonport/North Launceston)  
Tom Donnelly (North Launceston)  
Jackson Callow (North Launceston)  
Mitch O’Neill (North Hobart)  
Alec Wright (Launceston)  
Jake Creswell (Clarence)  
Josh Gillow (Launceston)  
Zac Morris (Launceston)  
Ben Simpson (North Launceston)  
Patrick Walker (North Hobart)  
Oliver Sanders (North Launceston)  
Dom White (North Hobart)  
George McLeod (North Hobart)