

EWING'S SET TO HIT 500

By JESS WEBSTER

DARREN Ewing considers himself "the lucky one" for being on the end of some first-class delivery from his NT Thunder teammates over the years.

The likes of midfielders Andrew McLeod, Cameron and Jarred Ilett, Shannon Rioli, Jake Dignan, and now Nathan Djerrkura and Alwyn Davey have made life a little easier for the star full-forward.

After finishing in the top two of the QAFL/NEAFL goal-kicking award for the past five years, and winning it three times, Ewing is on the cusp of booting his 500th goal in Thunder colours this weekend.

It's not a bad record for a player originally recruited to NTFL club Palmerston as a half-back flanker.

Ewing – who averages 4.4 goals per match – said that he was simply happy to get a game at the club in the first place.

"My life is pretty easy when you are in a good team with some of the delivery I have gotten," he said.

"When I am watching my edits, Shannon Rioli always seems to feed

me a lot as well as the Iletts (Cameron and Jarred) over the years. Ross Tungatalum as well, and Iggy (Vallejo) in 2011 – there have just been so many good players who are all really highly skilled.

"I'm just the lucky bloke who gets to play at full-forward in a team which has always had so much talent available to it."

Ewing has been named in the QAFL/NEAFL Team of the Year four times and represented the NEAFL against the WAFL in 2011.

Originally from Penshurst in country Victoria, Ewing has developed a cult following for his goal-kicking feats in the black, white and ochre guernsey.

And he says he wouldn't have it any other way.

"When you are young you loved your footy a lot more, but playing up here I've had some of my best memories," he said.

"I don't think I would get a kick down south – it's too cold.

"I wouldn't want to play anywhere else but up here."

Ewing needs five more to hit 500 against the Brisbane Lions Reserves at the Gabba today. The match kicks off at 3.30pm.

DARREN EWING

Age: 27

Recruited from: Palmerston

Height: 183cm

Weight: 95kg

Games: 112

Goals: 495 (494 NEAFL, 1 Foxtel Cup)

Average: 4.4 per match

Ray Hughson Trophy winner

2009, 2011, 2013

Ray Hughson Trophy runner-up

2010, 2012

NT Thunder leading goal-kicker

2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013

NT Thunder best-and-fairest

runner-up 2011

QAFL/NEAFL Team of the Year

selection 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013

NEAFL representative v WAFL 2011

BIGGEST HAULS

14 goals v Labrador at Yeronga Oval in Round 14, 2013

11 goals v Labrador at TIO Stadium in Round 21, 2011

11 goals v Redland at Victoria Point in Round 5, 2012

10 goals v Sydney University at TIO Stadium in Round 13, 2014

10 goals v Gold Coast Suns at Cazalys Stadium in Round 16, 2011

Top 5 memorable moments

1. EVEN the most die-hard supporters wouldn't have given Ewing a fighting chance of kicking the 12 goals needed in the final round of 2011 against Labrador to reach a century. But it was his second-half performance that had everyone on the edge of their seats at TIO Stadium.

With a bag that included a 65m torpedo, teammates desperately trying to spot Ewing in a flooded forward line as the minutes ticked down. He dropped a chest mark from a Shannon Rioli pass shortly before the siren sounded, where he was stranded on 99 for the season. Although his then record bag of 11 goals was bitter-sweet, it will be a moment Territory football fans will never forget.

2. EWING proved he has no problems matching it with the best of the best during one match at Cazalys Stadium in Cairns in 2012. Thunder were taking on the Gold Coast Suns Reserves where Joel Tippett was sent to man the star full-forward from the bounce. Ewing had three

goals on Tippett early in the match before the Suns switched another AFL-listed player, Jack Hutchins, on to Ewing to try to nullify his influence. He finished on 10.

3. NEEDING a win to keep their finals hopes alive, Thunder were up against the reigning premiers, the Brisbane Lions Reserves, in Round 18 last year. They were in front by a point late in the match when Brant Chambers took a mark on the boundary. Ewing casually ran around him, asking for a handball, before snapping an absolute gem from 45m out on a tight angle to seal victory. It was Ewing's sixth goal playing against AFL-listed defender Niall McKeever, and handed the Lions their first loss against a non-AFL club in two years.

4. NEARLY 5000 fans packed into TIO Stadium for the club's first ever home final against Mt Gravatt in 2011. A week earlier Ewing claimed his second Ray Hughson Trophy with 99 goals for the sea-

son. His 100th came early in the first quarter of their major semi-final clash when Rioli again found him on the lead, much to the delight of the passionate Top End fans. After the Vultures kept Ewing goal-less just three weeks earlier, he grabbed a bag of eight as the Territory qualified for the NEAFL grand final for the first time.

5. A SMALL town plumber from country Victoria with an unconventional body shape for a full-forward wrote himself into the history books in Round 1, 2009 when he kicked NT Thunder's first-ever goal. Ewing was originally recruited to NTFL Palmerston from Penshurst as a half-back flanker, despite his assertions he was, in fact, a pretty good full-forward. It seems fitting Ewing christened Thunder's entry into the then QAFL with a grubber goal after three minutes against powerhouse Southport – and 112 games, 495 goals and three Ray Hughson Trophies later, he remains one of the most formidable forwards the competition has seen.

NT Thunder star forward Darren Ewing is approaching his 500th goal in the NEAFL competition. Picture: PATRINA MALONE

No change to player points this year McKenzie nominated for rising star

THE AFLNT has opted not to change player points ahead of the 2014-15 NTFL season.

After consultation between the AFLNT executive and representatives of the TIO NTFL Premier League clubs on Monday night, total points will remain at 22 for next season.

There was talking of reducing it to 20, but the majority of NTFL clubs were against that.

The introduction of a points value for underage players, to stop poaching from rival NTFL clubs before they've played a premier league match, will not happen in the near future.

Initial suggestions were to increase their value from zero points to two, but the AFLNT hierarchy opted against that.

The player points system will be reviewed after the 2014-15 season to assess whether it has achieved its objectives and could be reduced then.

TERRITORY Thunder wingman Shaq McKenzie continues to take everything in his stride after earning the Round 14 NEAFL Rising Star nomination.

The 20-year-old West Australian joined the club this year after a stellar NTFL season,

which saw the speedy midfielder finish runner-up in St Marys best-and-fairest award.

He has developed a love affair with Territory football, and made the most of the free-flowing style with a 30-possession performance against Redland at TIO Stadium.

Coach Xavier Clarke said McKenzie had started to feel at home in the NEAFL.

"In his last three games, he has had at least 28 touches in each of them," Clarke said.

He joins Errin Wasley-Black (Round 1) as NEAFL Rising Star nominees.