

Dane's got a grand feeling

By NINO BUCCI

EIGHT-YEAR-OLD Dane Holmberg has won a prize so coveted that 16 teams of grown men fight for the same honour each year.

As part of the NAB AFL Auskick competition, Dane will play football on the MCG on Grand Final day.

The Bendigo boy will join 93 other winners from each Auskick development region throughout Australia to play football during the half-time interval.

He will also join Auskick ambassador Robert DiPierdomenico in the Grand Final parade, participate in the pre-match entertainment and visit the MCG's National Sports Museum.

"Most supporters could only ever dream of what these 94 kids are about to embark on," Mr DiPierdomenico said.

"They are flown to Melbourne to participate in the AFL Grand Final Parade, before taking to the MCG at half-time ... a memory they will carry with them for the rest of their lives."

Although the keen West



ON THE BALL: Dane Holmberg, 8, will play football on the MCG on Grand Final day. Picture: BRENDAN McCARTHY

Coast Eagles fan will not be able to see his favourite team on the big stage considering its poor 2008 season, Dane is still counting the sleeps until he can grace the hallowed MCG turf.

"Running on the field and playing is what I'm looking forward to the most," he said.



IN BLOOM: Harcourt flowergrower Valerie Blake with some of her proteas.

Picture: BILL CONROY

Business growing nicely

By AMY CLYNE

FINDING their niche then pursuing it with a passion is the reason countries across the world want to do business with Harcourt flowergrowers Valerie and John Blake.

The husband and wife team grow proteas on their four-hectare property and are about to move into their busiest time of year.

"Being a little bit colder here in Harcourt, we can cut the majority of flowers a little later than others," Mr Blake said.

"So we have the advantage of coming in just as they are all dropping off."

The couple have been growing the long-lasting South African flowers, along with leucadendrons and leucospermums, for the past 25 years.

They began on less than a hectare at Castlemaine af-

ter Mr Blake read an article on how to grow the expensive flowers for profit.

"John had a vision and away he went with it. I supported him, and it's worked really well," Mrs Blake said.

Now they export to many countries, including Japan, Korea and Holland, as well as supplying local florists.

Mr Blake said although they were semi-retired, the couple was probably busier than they had ever been

supplying flowers to hotels and businesses across the world.

"It's a lot of work, but it keeps us busy," he said.

(Proteas) are in demand — we can't ever supply enough to our buyer in Japan."

He said the secret to their success was choosing a good quality product and working hard on their idea.

"We invested a lot into it and put in a lot of effort, and that has paid off," he said.

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