

**Success story 2022     James Patzel - Woodcroft College**

## Successful sports leadership takes centre stage for James.

Woodcroft College student James Patzel was excited to be one of the first students undertaking the new Stage 2 SACE subject Activating Identities and Futures (AIF), when his school became involved in the initial pilot in Semester 1 2022.

The new subject provides an opportunity for students to explore an idea, problem or concept related to an area of personal interest through a process of self-directed inquiry.

James decided to combine two of his favourite areas of interest – leadership and its application in sport. Driven and determined to succeed, James was keen to learn how to further develop his skills, knowledge and capabilities.

James drew on his own experience participating in district level sports, as well as researching elite sports leaders and athletes, and even exploring parallels found in business leadership. He identified traits that contributed to being a successful leader and how to develop and hone these traits.

“I looked extensively into successful sports leadership and attempted to identify the traits and skills of a perfect sports leader, if such thing exists. I looked at the traits and skills successful leaders possessed and how all leaders can progress and improve those skills and traits in themselves. I studied and analysed a variety of leadership fields, drawing parallels from my primary sports leadership sources, business leaders and elite level athletes in a range of sporting disciplines in order to piece together common themes that make each of them successful,” said James.

He was open to exploring the concepts he had learnt about and applying them to his own practice on the sporting field.

“Despite my significant previous knowledge and experience of leadership, the capacity for me to learn and improve my leadership skills through the AIF was a really exciting opportunity. No-one’s ever going to be perfect however, acknowledging and applying the leadership methods of the world’s most successful leaders will help me to be the best leader possible.”

While James has a confidence in leading his team and improving group performance, he understands that a betterment in his leadership capabilities will help him reach the next level. Effectual leadership coming from some of the world’s best sports leaders were of particular importance to James in his hunt to improve, not just his own leadership, but similarly the leadership potential of all sports leaders alike. To do this, spreading the information to a diverse range of leaders is critically important. However, catering to a variety of different age groups and learning styles makes this a difficult task and one that James battled with throughout the AIF.

Supporting James, pushing for him to venture outside his comfort zones and utilise the freedom of the new AIF approach on this particular idea, was James’s teacher, Tarnya Saunderson.

Initially James was looking to deliver a written report, but Tarnya’s active discouragement of the old Research Project style helped James to push the boundaries with his thinking, decision making and approach to tackling his AIF project

Originally, this confident young man veered away from the TED talk concept of a filmed public presentation, looking to use more traditional forms of sports journalism or even a podcast.

Tarnya could see the potential for growth and knew James was up for the challenge. Following encouragement from her when reviewing the idea of TED talks again, James realised the form perfectly highlighted the importance of stories in communicating ground-breaking ideas.

The result was two specialised TED talk-style presentations on how to become a successful leader and the skills and traits involved in allowing leaders to thrive in their environment. James constructed five main points, encompassing the most valuable leadership traits and characteristics from his analysis and outlined their importance and methods in which the viewer could use to improve these five target areas in themselves.

Stepping up and exploring a more public facing text type through the TED Talk style, provided an opportunity for personal growth and a deeper understanding of communication within leadership identity, roles and management.

As a leader himself on the sports field, he understands the importance of leadership within a team environment and the significance of a strong leading individual. Part of the task as a leader, James explains, is to become a role model for the team and lead from the front to drive success.

“It is interesting because in the aspect of sport, I like to lead from the front, to exhibit and achieve my goals and help the team to succeed. To be a strong captain I feel becoming a role model is the best way for me to be successful. However, with leadership as a whole, there is no single ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to becoming a successful leader. Leading by example and setting the standard, leading to ensure everyone is equal, or leading a group from within, quietly achieving can all be successful modes of leadership. Throughout my AIF I wanted to ensure that everyone could understand the importance of this. That their leadership style can be effective no matter its approach, it is simply the way in which you conduct yourself, your team and your group environment that sets your leadership apart from being good to being really strong,” said James.

“Going back to my original research of sports leaders, some of the most inspirational and successful among them are not the biggest personalities, but they are absolutely incredible athletes that through their sporting abilities realise that they have become a leader and eventually grow into the role through the learning of the most successful attributes, styles and traits that work for them. I have learnt through this subject that there is not perfect leader, that doesn’t exist, but there is a perfect leader for a perfect time.”