Former Brisbane Lions player Sam Michael uses Gold Coast gym to earn shot with Essendon

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SAM Michael is the AFL discard who has used a Gold Coast gym to relaunch his career at Essendon.

The 22-year-old has opened up about the endless hours spent battling peak hour traffic after work in Brisbane to train with Gold Coast-based coach Joey Hayes that has transformed him from AFL outcast to Round 1 contender.

"I wasn't even in the frame of mind for this before Christmas," Michael said.

"I was just thinking about playing another season with Redland in the NEAFL and working Monday to Friday. But now I'm preparing myself for an AFL season which is a massive change but one I'm looking to grab with both hands and make the most of it."

Michael was the last of 10 top-up players signed by Essendon in the wake of the supplements saga that engulfed the club.

The 199cm ruckman played his three AFL games while at the Brisbane Lions in 2003 but after missing 10 weeks of the preseason leading into 2014 with a broken hand and torn hamstring he was unable to break back into the side and was subsequently delisted.

Michael admitted he thought his AFL career was over and he began planning life away from football.

"Honestly I did (think it was over) but funny things happened and I got that opportunity," Michael said.

But an offer to play in the 2015 NAB Challenge for the Bombers reignited his desire to reach the AFL again. Little did he know his work in the preseason competition and relationships formed would lay the foundation for his return.

"It was a piece to the puzzle," Michael said.

"I was quite familiar with the playing group and the coaches that were already there and I think being there last year helped the cause this year.
"Last year reignited the flame and made me realise I want to get back to the AFL after initially being discouraged after being delisted by the Lions. It gave me that glimmer of hope."

Michael linked up with Hayes, who has worked with the likes of Tippett brothers Kurt (Sydney Swans) and Joel (North Melbourne) at his USP PIT Gymnasium in November with a goal to get to the 2016 draft.

"When I went to Joey it was like a last-ditch effort to give myself that edge and the best possible chance to put myself in a position to get noticed and get another opportunity," Michael said.

The work proved critical after getting a shock call-up from the Bombers in January where he arrived with the physical conditioning that could rival many current players.

Michael said the work had put him in better shape than when he played at the Lions.

"I'd say I'm more powerful and strong, particularly with my leg strength, and improved my speed and vertical leap" he said.

"I feel I'm better as an overall package than what I was at the Lions, both physically and mentally."

While many top-up players have openly said they will not play beyond this season, Michael will aim to use it as the start of a fulltime comeback.

"I really want it to be the beginning of something," Michael said.

"I'm hoping to make a career out of this opportunity. That's what this is all about. Not only to help the football club but reignite my career as well."

That journey could start as early as this Saturday if Michael earns selection in the Round 1 team to take on the Gold Coast Suns in the city where he crafted his comeback.

"The Suns will be very challenging and will be looking to come out and prove a point themselves," Michael said.

"They have taken their game to a different level through the preseason and are playing some good contested football so we are going to have to beat them in that area if we want to be in with a shot at winning."