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Dale Thomas hoping to fill a hole for Magpies

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Collingwood's Dale Thomas, right, with the Tooth Fairy and Breannah Arnel at a Smile Solutions dental clinic yesterday Picture: Josie Hayden Source: Herald Sun

COLLINGWOOD star Dale Thomas yesterday declared himself fit for what shapes as the Magpies' hardest task to date this season against Hawthorn on Sunday at the MCG.

After two solid wins over North Melbourne and Carlton to begin the season, the Magpies received further good news with scans clearing veteran ruckman Darren Jolly of serious rib damage following an incident that forced him out of the match early against the Blues.

The 31-year-old will be monitored this week but in further evidence of the Magpies' depth, both Ben Hudson and Jarrod Witts are on standby should Collingwood opt to take a cautious approach with its No 1 ruckman.

But it is the availability of Thomas that will strengthen the Magpies side, should coach Nathan Buckley opt to include him for its match against an opponent it lost to three times last season.

The midfielder, who underwent surgery on an ankle in the off-season, gathered 24 touches and kicked a goal in a VFL match against North Ballarat on the weekend and plans to press his case with Buckley.

"I'll be certainly telling him that if he's happy to pick me, I'll be more than happy to play," he said.

"It seems like ages ago now that the surgery actually happened, so to be back out there now, hopefully I can help out if I get back in to the senior side this week."

While Thomas looms as a probable starter, Buckley made it clear following the defeat of Carlton that it would be difficult for those outside the current side to dislodge the incumbents.

"Right now, possession is nine-tenths," he said.

Among those to fare well in the absence of more established stars are Jamie Elliott, who kicked five goals against Carlton, and mature-age recruit Sam Dwyer, who gathered 23 touches on Sunday.

Steele Sidebottom, who kicked the sealer against Carlton after receiving a handball from Elliott, said neither had surprised with their performances.

"As soon as (Dwyer) started playing, everyone sort of knew he was a good player," he told SEN Radio.

"It's been a long time for him -- I think he played about eight years of VFL -- for him to get his chance. Now he's grabbing it with both hands.

"Billy (Elliott) has had an awesome pre-season. He played a fair few games last year but probably didn't hit the scoreboard as well as he would have liked.

"It is probably a sign of the work he has done over the pre-season -- for him to kick five yesterday was unreal."

The form of that pair and others means the out-of-contract Thomas will wait until later this week for confirmation that he will start against Hawthorn.

Alan Didak and Alex Fasolo, who both battled hamstring issues in the pre-season, are in a similar position after gathering plenty of the ball at VFL level.

"A lot of the blokes who are coming into the senior team are doing a fantastic job," Thomas said. "It's a good problem to have. We've obviously got a pretty healthy list and a lot of the blokes coming in to the senior team are doing a fantastic job."

Thomas believes the Magpies have shown in both wins to date that they have improved from last season, though Sunday shapes as a more accurate gauge because Hawthorn won all three matches between the two sides convincingly last year.