

Stenglein, Fletcher create some new mischief
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LONG before they were paired in the West Coast midfield, Tyson Stenglein and Chad Fletcher were a formidable combination.

The two Eagles have been great mates for 15 years and this season football has reunited them at West Coast. Sports-mad boys, they grew up as keen Hawthorn supporters living on the same street, went to the same primary school, played junior football together and shared a love of surfing.

However, not all their energies were directed to such honourable pursuits, as Stenglein recalled.

"Chad ended up getting into a bit of mischief with me in our younger days," Stenglein said.

"We used to tell our parents we were sleeping at each other's house and sneak out to meet our girlfriends.

"He was always pretty good with the girls, Chad. He was a year older than me and he always used to tee them up. I think he got me my first kiss down by the cricket nets."

But like all good things it came to an end, as Fletcher revealed.

"One night we rode home and Tyson had this big, angry dog which started barking as we tried to sneak in the back door," Fletcher said. "We both got busted and grounded and couldn't see each other for a couple of weeks. I blame him for that one."

While girls, surfing and other sports were a constant distraction, their love of footy won out in the end.

Fletcher's father was the president of the WA Hawthorn supporters group for a period and Fletcher wanted to be Dermott Brereton when they kicked the ball around the park, while Stenglein was a Jason Dunstall fan. The pair was a part of a premiership-winning under-16s side with Karrinyup - that side also boasting the talents of Des Headland, Phil Read and Adam Lange, all of whom went on to play AFL football.

Stenglein and Fletcher then graduated to Subiaco colts and the rest, as they say, is history. Stenglein had to head to South Australia for his chance at AFL football after being drafted by Adelaide with the 29th pick at the 1998 national draft.

His best mate wasn't so fortunate, being overlooked in the draft before being given his chance to shine through the Eagles' rookie list, from which he was promoted in 1998.

Throughout it all, the pair stayed in touch and talked about playing together, a dream that became reality when the Eagles did a deal to secure Stenglein at the end of last year.

Now they find themselves two wins shy of living every junior footballer's dream of an AFL premiership.

Although Fletcher's path to AFL football was trickier, Stenglein said he always exhibited a burning desire to play football at the top level.

"We'd kick the footy down the park and as youngsters we played all kinds of sports - cricket, soccer and all that," Stenglein said.

"At a younger age, I wasn't so focused on playing AFL football, it was more just playing sport.

"I definitely think Chad was really focused on AFL. He practised his skills a lot, probably more so than me at a younger age, and was pretty focused on where he was going."

He said Fletcher's development into one of the competition's premier midfielders was testament to his character.

"Chad is a really good story," Stenglein said. "Through determination, he has got to where is.

"He has been ultra-consistent and that comes from the professionalism in his preparation and he deserves credit for that."

Fletcher is similarly complimentary about 'Stinger'.

"Talking to Cuzzy (Ben Cousins) a couple of times after we played Adelaide, he said (Stenglein) was the best tagger in the competition," Fletcher said.

"It was a good wrap from one of the best players in the competition. He had a great career with Adelaide."

Fletcher is delighted to have Stenglein back at his side and said he had been a valuable addition to West Coast this season.

"He loves all the same interests that I do and we're going away surfing at the end of the year," Fletcher said.

"I have been trying to get him back for a couple of years, because I thought he would be a good acquisition for our side. It is awesome to have him back, he is a great guy and he's good bloke to have at the footy club."

Stenglein said Fletcher's presence made the transition from Crow to Eagle much smoother.

"Chad was really good support," he said. "For me to come down to the club and get to know a lot of the guys through Chad was just great.

"I wanted to come home for family, but he made the decision of what club to choose easier."