

## Former VFL Collingwood player Billy Barden escapes drug conviction

- LAURA ARMITAGE
- HEIDELBERG LEADER

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### **A FORMER Collingwood VFL player has escaped conviction for trafficking cocaine with a \$5000 fine.**

Billy Barden, who played for the Magpie reserves last year, pleaded guilty at the Melbourne Magistrates' Court on Wednesday to the charge of trafficking cocaine between June 21, and August 27, in 2013.

*Heidelberg Leader* previously reported Barden was part of a group arrested last year as part of a Mill Park police investigation into an alleged ice trafficking syndicate — Operation Twomoons.

Defence barrister Matt Fisher told the court Barden had not attempted to traffic drugs commercially but was distributing between his friends socially.

The court heard that despite the charges, the Lower Plenty Football Club — where Barden played since he was 16 — had stood by him.

Mr Fisher said Barden was now mentoring younger players aged between 17 and 18.

In his judgment, Magistrate Gregory Robinson said he would not record a conviction so Barden could continue with his industry qualification and business interests.

Mr Robinson said while Barden had bought a great amount of discredit to

himself by his actions he believed a conviction would have “very real impacts” on his ability to contribute to the community.

“But with this experience I hope you can learn to help in a leadership role and educate young men about getting involved in drugs,” Mr Robinson said.

Three other charges against Barden — attempting to traffic, possessing and attempting to possess cocaine — were withdrawn.

Another man caught in the Operation Twomoons sting, Matthew McClusky also appeared in front of Mr Robinson, and left court with no conviction, a good-behaviour bond and \$3000 fine after pleading guilty to drug possession.

Other defendants from Operation Twomoons case will appear at the Melbourne Magistrates’ Court in November and December.