



**LEADING FROM THE FRONT:** Joel Wood has been in sizzling early season form, scoring five times from six starts for the Magpies. Picture Jonathan Carroll

# Comets visit a Mustang yardstick

**BASKETBALL**  
BY RICK ALLEN

"THEY bring that Sydney arrogance with them, so there's nothing we'd like more than to send them home with their tails between their legs."

Strong words, but Maitland Mustangs coach Luke Boyle makes no secret of the importance of Saturday's home game against the Sydney Comets.

"They started the season slowly but have a strong playing list and have been very impressive over the last three or four weeks," Boyle said.

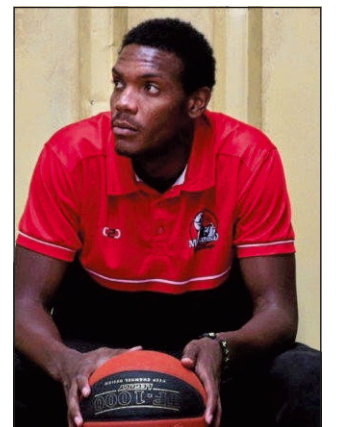
"In many ways this is a match that will tell us just where we're at.

"In guys like Tom Dawson - the biggest player in the league, and skilful guard Indiana Faithfull, who have both played for the Sydney Kings - they have some big time players."

But for all that, the Mustangs are riding high in second place on the ladder with eight wins from 10 matches, and will go in full of confidence.

It's their best start a season for a number of years and there's little doubt it's their strongest team during that time.

"We played competition leaders Central Coast on their home court the other day and they insisted we were the favourites going into the game, so that shows



**HOT FORM:** Isaiah Ellis.

that we're being taken seriously," Boyle said.

"I think it's combination of things. Our big import Isaiah Ellis is the best defender in the league, but can also score.

"He is playing a key role at centre and allowing our other players to do their thing.

"And our captain and point guard Terrell Turner has been with us for a number of years, but I honestly think he's playing his best his best ball in years.

"The other thing is that a lot of our younger players have stepped up and are starting to really shine this season. We have so many players who are chipping in with double figure points that it makes us a difficult side to shut down."

Tip off will be at 5pm.

The Maitland Mustangs women's team will play the Comets at 7pm in what should be a tight struggle.

## Competition for places a welcome headache for coach

**FOOTBALL**

MAITLAND Magpies coach Mick Bolch has a problem - and he's loving it.

"Every week I have 15 players pushing hard for a first grade spot," he said.

"I honestly don't know what my starting side will be and that's a good sign. A lot of coaches would like to be in that position."

This week the Magpies, sit-

ting mid-table on 11 points, are away to Hamilton Olympic who are one point behind them on 10 points, in what will be a tough struggle.

"The ladder is a little deceptive at this stage because we've had the bye and also had a game washed out, so to be only three points off the lead is satisfying," Bolch said.

"We started slowly and lost our first game to Weston, but

are undefeated in our last five, and had a draw with leaders Lambton Jaffas last match, so we're happy with how we're progressing.

"We're coming over the top of opposition sides in the second half and scoring a lot of goals late - and that's a tribute not just to our fitness but also the culture and desire within the club."

The Magpies have con-

ceded just seven goals in six starts, the best defensive record in the league.

At the same time striker Joel Woods has been in super form, scoring five goals in six games to be third on the competition's goal-scoring list.

Weston Workers are away to Charlestown City on Sunday.

— RICK ALLEN

## FFA Cup midweek

**FOOTBALL**

THERE were mixed results for Hunter teams in the nation-wide FFA Cup soccer fifth round during the week. Playing at home, Weston Workers had a comfortable 4-1 win over Cooks Hill United, while Beresfield proved no match for the table-topping Lambton Jaffas side, going down 10-0. The big surprise was Cessnock Hornets who, after scoring early, scored again in the fourth minute of extra time to edge out Lake Macquarie City 2-1.



**FINDING HIS FEET:** James Hawkins who returned to rugby this season and has helped strengthen the Blacks squad.

## Blacks wary of struggling Beaches

**RUGBY UNION**

BY RIGHTS it should be a comfortable win ... but how many times have you heard that?

Maitland Blacks, last year's grand finalists and in sound early season form - two wins, a narrow last minute loss and a bye from their four games - against Southern Beaches, a side clearly struggling and yet to record their first win.

"The minute you start thinking like that you're asking for trouble," Blacks coach Matt Thomas said.

"But Beaches have lost a couple of their best players over the off-season and it looks to have taken a toll.

"We'd like to be able to record a good win not just for ourselves and to consolidate our position, but for winger Rob Williamson who's celebrating his 100th first grade game.

"And it has been a stop-start season so far for us ... Easter, the bye ... so we want to get some momentum and some consistency, and this is a good chance to start."