

SPORT

Eagles biggest test of Maitland's title mettle

SOCCER

BY MICHAEL HARTSHORN

THE Magpies will learn on Saturday if they can replace the Eagles as the highest flying bird in Hunter football.

The battle between the fourth-placed Maitland and top of the table Edgeworth could well decide the minor premiership for season 2019 and grand final favouritism.

"Edgy has won the minor premiership four years in a row, they will be up for what really is the minor premiership game," Magpies coach Mick Bolch said this week.

"If we beat them we go two points behind with three games in hand and if they beat us they skip eight points clear of us," Bolch said.

"It's a massive game.

"(Damian) Zane is a great coach he will have them set up for us, he would have been watching our last couple of games.

"This will be the biggest test for the boys so far."

The Magpies go into the game against the competition leaders full of confidence after a 3-0 win against Charlestown City Blues at Cooks Square Park last Sunday.

Jimmy Thompson scored for the second successive week and Alex Read and Matt Thompson also got goals after coming on in the second half off the bench.

"I thought it was probably the best half of football we've had all year. The balance looked really good and it's going back to six or seven weeks ago when you had that 13 or 14 players to select from.

"Ready and Thommo coming off the bench. We're really getting some impact



CONFIDENT: Maitland's Jimmy Thompson looms large in proceedings after finding goal-scoring form over the past two weeks. **Picture:** Michael Hartshorn

off the bench like we were when we had Pratty (Sean Pratt), Ready and Brownny (Grant Brown) coming off.

"If you've got that depth it really helps, but it is a different beast this week. Edgy are on top of the ladder and minor premiers for the past four years for very good reasons."

Maitland is a more well-rounded team this season with Joel Wood the target up front, Tommy Davis boosting the defence and

former Newcastle Jets player Nick Cowburn an exciting addition to the squad over the past two weeks who is all class in the midfield.

"You look at where we were last year and we drew twice with Phoenix who ran last, we drew with Lakes, we drew with Adamstown, we lost to Weston who were down at the bottom," Bolch said.

"We haven't done that this year. Realistically when you break it down. We

lost to Weston in the first game when we were a bit under-done and we lost to Olympic, they are the only losses of the year.

"Confidence is very good and I expect them to be really up for it on Saturday.

"They really work hard for each other as a group.

"A few of them are getting on a bit, Trotty is 34, Thommo is 37, Clarke is late 20s, Carl Thornton is 31 so they are getting on in their career

and want to win something together. The whole culture of the club is going well."

With a defence which is returning to its best, Maitland's favour front three of Wood, Jimmy Thompson and Clarke looms large.

"We break with a lot of speed, with them three going forward and the Swans and Cowby linking with them in attack we break really quick and it's hard for teams to adjust to it," Bolch said.

Young gun makes debut

From page 32

"It's a great opportunity for him," Blacks coach Matt Thomas said.

"I just said to him 'I've backed you, now you've got to back yourself'."

Parkinson, who also plays first grade cricket for nearby Northern Suburbs in the Maitland district competition, has recently completed representative rugby duties with the NSW under-18 squad.

"He could have played 18s but they had 29 players so he wanted to come and try grade," Thomas said.

"He started in thirds. There was an injury in seconds, he came up and has killed it ever since. Now he's come back from rep, he's firing and ready to go."

Parkinson will start on the wing for fourth-placed Maitland.

"I wasn't expecting to be making my first grade debut this year at all," Parkinson said at Marcellin Park on Thursday night.

"I played third grade and won the players' player award and then got asked to play second grade and got players players twice again.

"I would have been wrapped to play a few more games in second grade, to play first grade is pretty special at this stage.

"Being at the Blacks has been part of my life from before I can remember."

Parkinson comes up for Jordan Bower with Thomas forced to shuffle his XV because of the player points system. Tom Vincent comes in for front-rower Harrison Chapman, who is away with NSW Country. Michael Howell has been named No.8.

Council, Magpies onside for Mariners clash

FOOTBALL

REPRESENTATIVES from Maitland FC and Maitland City Council have met and decided to work together to showcase the big FFA Cup match against the Central Coast Mariners at Maitland No.1 Sportsground later this month.

There was tension between the two parties - played out in the media - with the football club questioning Council's level of support for the Round of 32 match which will mark the first time an A-League club has played in Maitland.

Both parties have agreed to work together to capitalise on this unique opportunity which, instead of causing friction, should be generating substantial excitement within the community.

"Maitland FC acknowledges the support being received from Maitland City Council for this important match," club President Ray Watkins said.

"Council is providing significant support by meeting all Council costs associated with event planning, ground transition, before and after the event, and staff presence



A FIRST FOR THE CITY: The Magpies' FFA Cup clash with Central Coast Mariners in the FFA Cup.

to ensure the match is a success. Council is also providing underwriting support

of \$11,000, should the event suffer a loss.

"Maitland Football is also

tremendously appreciative of the support that we have received from Maitland business over the last few days."

Maitland FC reached the Round of 32 for the first time after beating Hamilton Olympic in mid June. In 2019, 737 clubs entered the knock out competition, with entrants originating from all over Australia.

Maitland City Council are also pleased to have cleared the air.

"I am pleased to have had the opportunity to meet with representatives of Maitland FC, who are very passionate

about both their sport and their club," Council General Manager David Evans said.

"Reaching the Round of 32 is a significant achievement and one that the whole city should be celebrating.

"Council is doing their part so I would now strongly encourage the community to get behind the club by purchasing tickets and get along to the match to show their support as well'.

The match is on Wednesday, July 31, at 5.30pm. To book tickets visit maitland.nsw.gov.au/maitland-fc-v-central-coast-mariners.