

Mustangs women win a thriller, now for Hunters

BASKETBALL

BY JACQUI NEILL

WITH the Maitland Mustangs Championship Women's team feeling stronger, they achieved a much-needed win on the road against Hills Hornets last weekend.

The match went down to the wire with the Mustangs holding on 63-60 despite Hills' last ditch efforts to tie the game. With only five seconds remaining Hills called a timeout then attempted a 3-point play which would have sent the game into overtime.

Alyssa Bennett registered yet another double double with 13 points and 11 rebounds, Shakera Reilly led the scoring with 15 points and Rachel Williams notched 12.

With injuries plaguing the team in what has been an already challenging season, they were happy to have the majority of the team back on the court together.

Rachel Williams returned after five weeks out and proved was an essential ingredient against Hills.

"It felt so good to be back on the court and playing with the girls again," she said. "After sitting out the majority of last year due to injury and having to sit out again this year for five weeks, it was extremely frustrating.

"Considering I played eight games with the injury (evulsion fracture) prior to getting it looked at and then put in plaster, it has healed quickly.

"It felt good to be able to play again relatively pain free, thanks largely to John Munro with injury rehab."

Saturday's win was especially sweet as it served as



WELCOME RETURN: Rachel Williams was back in action against the Hornets after five weeks on the sideline with injury.

payback for the eight-point loss when the two sides met earlier in the season - a game coach Mark Wawszakowicz felt they could have won.

Team confidence is at an all-time high.

"On Saturday we all played as a team, we did the little things throughout the game and outran them throughout the dying stages," Williams said.

"Being down six [points] with just over a minute to

go and come back to win by three really showed how the energy from the bench and girls on the court impacted our performance."

It is clear the team finally have the depth back that they had been missing for a few weeks.

Jessica Brett was strong for the whole game for the first time since returning from injury and contributed solid minutes.

Taylor Joyce brought a lot

of energy, particularly on the defensive end, while Hannah Fox continues to improve, contributed at both ends.

Looking toward this weekend's match up against rivals Newcastle Hunters, the team is taking a nothing to lose approach - and why not? They're facing a team who are 15-0 this season.

The Mustangs aim to bring the same energy and commitment as they did against Hills and rise to

the challenge.

Coach Wawszakowicz shares the enthusiasm.

"I keep saying one day we are going to beat someone that shocks the league. We are running out of opportunities so this is a big one," he said. "It would really put a stamp on our season."

The women tip off at 5pm followed by the men at 7pm competing for the Kibble-Mallon Cup at the Federation Centre.

Magpies gear up for big month

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Bolch said he noticed a change in attitude at the club after the 4-0 loss to Hamilton Olympic, the Magpies' last loss before their current four-win streak in the league and six overall.

"The boys knew that the effort and our performance on the day was not what was expected and not what we are about. Since then the whole squad has clicked into gear.

"The last two games the Valentine game and the Weston game it's been Tommy Duggan and Louis Townsend who stood up and scored the winning goal.

"The first week it was a Tommy Duggan assist and Louis Townsend scoring his first goal in first grade and last weekend it was Louis Townsend winning a ball in the midfield with two brilliant challenges and Tommy Duggan scoring.

"So at the moment the squad is really fighting for spots and in the weeks to come we will have Matt Thompson coming back, Nick Cowburn coming in, Sean Pratt, Grant Brown and Ryan Broadley coming back.

"It's shaping up very well for us at the moment.

"We are concentrating on a week at a time and if we pick up our three points then the minor premiership and finals will take care of themselves."

Maitland sit fourth on the table equal on 23 points with Edgeworth and two points behind top side Weston. However, they have two games in hand on both teams and one-game on second-placed Broadmeadow (24).

Weston Bears have the bye.

Thompson tips racing to go on at Cessnock

HORSE RACING

CHAMPION jockey Robert Thompson has welcomed news his beloved home track of Cessnock is set to become a pre-training facility but he hopes race meetings will not be lost to the town.

Racing NSW chief Peter V'landys revealed this month to the *Sydney Morning Herald* that his organisation was in negotiations with Newcastle Jockey Club to buy the Cessnock course, which it would convert into a pre-training facility.

Funds from the sale would help the NJC to build new

stables at its Broadmeadow course. Cessnock, which has 11 meetings a year, would close to racing. V'landys has since told the *Cessnock Advertiser* some meetings could still be held at the track.

The potential wiping of race programs sparked anger in Cessnock, which has already lost all harness and greyhound meetings.

Thompson, Cessnock's favourite racing son, believed the track would keep "two or three" meetings a year.

"Especially Anzac Day," Thompson said.

"Probably Jungle Juice has



AT HOME: Robert Thompson after winning the 2015 Jungle Juice Cup at Cessnock. **Picture:** Jonathan Carroll

lost its shine a bit but they still get a good crowd and there's the Cessnock Cup. They are

probably the main three."

The 61-year-old, who has ridden more than 4400 win-

ners - an Australian record, said Cessnock should welcome the pre-training centre.

"There will be plenty of people coming and there should be plenty of jobs," he said. "V'landys is supposed to be putting plenty of money into it so it will be interesting to see what happens.

"It's a good, central area, not far from the expressway, so it would take some pressure off some Sydney tracks in terms of training facilities."

The Cessnock track has proven difficult to maintain, and several meetings have been transferred to Newcas-

tle in recent years.

Thompson believed Racing NSW would need to invest heavily in track maintenance for its pre-training centre, which should lead to a better surface for meetings.

"It's been the worst drought we've ever had, there's no water in the dams and there's no good irrigation system there. It's been very hard to keep it going," he said. "They've got to look after the tracks if they are going to have a pre-training centre, otherwise no one will come here."

- CRAIG KERRY