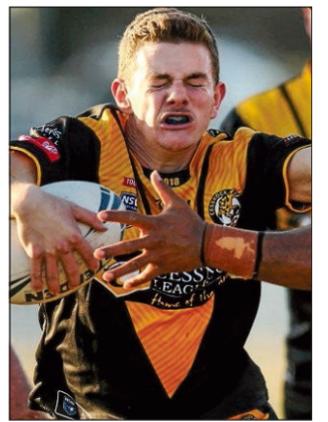


SPORT



DUMMY-HALF: Hayden Grainger set up a second-half try with a clever line-busting run against South Newcastle.



IMPRESSIVE: Fullback Harry O'Brien.

Goannas win as Dogs lose to Lakes

NEWCASTLE RL

CESSNOCK has jumped to fourth on the table just one point in the for and against columns behind third placed Kurri Kurri after another eventful round of Newcastle Rugby League.

The Pickers are fifth equal on 10 competition points with the Goannas and Bulldogs but with a significantly worse for and against record.

Cessnock was the sole Coalfields winner on the weekend accounting for Macquarie 32-14 at Cessnock Sportsground on Saturday.

The Bulldogs were 32-10 losers to Lakes United at Cahill Oval on Sunday.

Cessnock coach Todd Edwards labelled the Goannas' win a "step in the right direction".

The victory followed consecutive losses, but the experienced coach won't be satisfied until the Goannas improve their consistency.

"It doesn't matter what the sport or what the level, you have to be consistent," Edwards said. "Wests and Souths have found consistency and none of the rest of us have."

— JAMES GARDINER

Pickers drop points but regain their fans' faith

NEWCASTLE RL

BY MICHAEL HARTSHORN

THE Maitland Pickers clocked up 13 second-half errors to blow any chance of victory against second placed South Newcastle at a wind-swept Townson Oval on Saturday.

But despite dropping the ball nine times, four times in try-scoring positions, the Pickers did regain the spirit missing in last week's second-half capitulation to Lakes and along with it the faith of their fans.

"Last week was depressing, this week was just a really frustrating performance

because I thought we were good enough to win," Pickers coach Luke Dorn said of the 24-16 result.

"I thought we gave ourselves a really good opportunity to win, but we weren't smart enough and made too many errors.

"We dropped two kick offs, had nine drop balls and two forward passes in the second half.

"Good luck winning a game like that."

The Pickers had plenty of good performers with co-skipper Sam Anderson playing almost the entire 80 minutes in his return from a fractured foot and fullback

Greg Morris outstanding in tricky conditions under the high ball.

Back-rowers Tylar Carter and joint skipper Brenton Horwood were both strong and played long minutes and Geordie Connelly and Frazer Pricer were damaging with their running game particularly in the first half.

Hayden Grainger and Jarrod Smith's partnership at dummyhalf if also prospering.

"Our effort was undeniable, we tried as hard as we possibly could today, which wasn't the case particularly in the second half last week.

"Unfortunately, we just

didn't back our effort up with the good thinking.

"Souths proved a better team in terms of physicality, game management and smarts, unfortunately."

Dorn said the Pickers were well placed at 12-all at half-time but failed to use the wind to their advantage in the second half.

"It was a really challenging wind in that first half and while I'm not a really big believer in the wind being worth x-amount of points - at 12-all at half-time I was very pleased because we worked hard.

"I thought more than having points in it, having the

wind in the second half gave us the opportunity to control the half but we did not use it at all to control the game.

"If we had have been able to kick it long into a corner and make them come out from deep it would have built pressure.

"But we didn't do that, we allowed them too many metres in returning the ball and there was no pressure on their kicking game against the wind.

"We might as well have had no wind. We only got to the fifth tackle twice and didn't kick it either time.

"We were very reactive, we didn't build pressure."



X-FACTOR: Ryan Clarke goes on the attack for the Magpies against Charlestown. Picture: Michael Hartshorn

Magpies steamroll Blues 3-0

From page 14

Shooting from 20 metres, Thompson launched into the shot and for once Archbold was caught flat footed.

Bolch said he was delighted with performances across the park.

"Clarkey was an X-factor again up in the front third," he said.

"Great work by Ready for the second goal after great lead up work by Clarkey.

"We're starting to get full strength back now. You look at the bench today, we had Matt Thompson, Alex Read, Tommy Duggan.

"I thought the balance of the side was a lot better today."

Bolch said Jimmy Thompson's hard work was now being rewarded in front of goal.

"We've told Jimmy we expect a goal a game now after last week and now this week," he said.

"Confidence is such a huge thing, he scored that goal last week and did really well for his goal today.

"There were a couple of lucky bounces back to him but he just wanted it and a composed finish as well.

"He has been in those position a couple of times this

year but rushed it or blasted it into the keeper.

"He took his time to draw the keeper to one side and put it in the opposite corner it was a great finish."

Bolch said he was equally pleased with a clean sheet as the three goals.

"It was something we spoke about before the game," he said.

"Zach Thomas was brilliant again across the backline. Cowby (Nick Cowburn) was better with another run under his belt and Thommo (Matt Thompson) got 25-30 minutes at the end and scored a very good goal."