

## SPORT

# Thornton, Thompson to start in must-win clash

## SOCCER

BY MICHAEL HARTSHORN

THE Maitland Magpies' two most inspirational players, skipper Carl Thornton and former Socceroo Matt Thompson, return to the starting line-up for Friday night's crucial match against Lake Macquarie.

Sitting on 27 points, just two points clear of Charles-town and three ahead of Lambton, the Magpies are taking no risks in what coach Mick Bolch has told his players is a must-win game.

While Maitland FC fans and the wider community have been swept up in the excitement of next Wednesday's FFA Cup Round of 32 clash against Central Coast, the playing group and coaches are not looking beyond Friday night.

"All the focus is on Friday night, we'll get it out of the way before we concentrate on the Mariners," Bolch said.

"Matt Thompson will come into the starting side on Friday night.

"He has had a few runs off the bench now and his match fitness has improved so we will give him a start on Friday night."

Bolch said Thornton, who had a long-standing commitment away from the district for last Saturday's 3-1 loss to Edgeworth, will be a huge boost for the team.

"He is so experienced and reads the game so well," he said.

"It was a massive loss last week, not having Carl there it changes the whole dynamic."

The Magpies and Eagles were evenly matched for most of the game, but Maitland did not have an answer when Edgeworth brought on



**CRUCIAL PLAYER:** Maitland skipper Carl Thornton returns to the Magpies line-up on Friday night after missing last Saturday's 3-1 loss to Edgeworth.

Daniel McBreen and Oliver Smith with 20 minutes to go.

"We probably had a bit better possession, without creating too many clear-cut chances but the same for them. They didn't create too many chances at all until that last 20 minutes.

"The week before we had Matt Thompson and Alex

Read coming off the bench with 20 to go and we were able to finish over Azzuri with two goals in the finish.

"Our depth is really hurting at the moment, Grant Brown is still out, Sean Pratt is away and Ryan Broadley is out injured.

"Last week we had Tommy Duggan and Louis Townsend

away. You take those five out and while we still have a quality 11 or 12 starting, but you are up against teams who can bring on Daniel McBreen and Oliver Smith off the bench with 20 to go that's where we were at five weeks ago."

Duggan and Townsend will be considered for starts

on Friday night, depending on how they recover from Tuesday's under-20s 3-1 loss to Lambton.

"It's a really important game on Friday night after losing to Edgy," Bolch said. "We need to win on Friday night as we can still slip out of the play-offs and finish fifth or sixth."



**STAYING:** Cessnock coach Todd Edwards.

## Edwards to coach Cessnock in 2020

## NEWCASTLE RL

IT'S a situation Cessnock hasn't found themselves in since Todd Edwards' previous stint in charge of the Goannas ended six years ago.

Edwards agreed this week to coach at Cessnock again in 2020, marking his seventh Newcastle Rugby League season running the Goannas' first grade team, and he says the decision provides the Coalfields club with some much-needed stability.

"It gives us some stability," Edwards told the *Newcastle Herald*.

"It's the first time since 2013 we've had the same coach two years in a row. They've all been one year coaches.

"There's been so much inconsistency. We need to try and get some consistency back in the joint."

Edwards had five campaigns at Cessnock between 2008 and 2013, missing only 2011 at the Knights, before returning in 2019.

Steve Kidd (2014, 2017), Craig Miller (2015), Daniel Smailes (2016) and Alan Lantry (2018) all had solo seasons at the Goannas between Edwards' stints.



**SCHOOL MATES:** Hunter Valley Grammar School students and CIS teammates Harvey Neville, Hunta Saunders and Cooper Jenkins.

## Jenkins earns Aussie jersey

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"It's a big step up playing against the men." Jenkins said

"When we were back playing at the Australian schoolboys, even though they were the best players in Australia they were nowhere near as physical as in first grade.

"They are not men. They are not as physically or mentally as strong."

Jenkins, who turned 18 on July 11, said he had committed himself to making the Australian team after narrowly missing out last year.

"I was close to making it

last year when they went to England. I was pretty devastated about missing that trip so I decided to give it a good crack this year to make it and play in the green and gold," he said.

Jenkins said it was great to be part of the CIS campaign with school mates Harvey Neville and Hunta Saunders.

"It was good to have them in the side as we are good mates," he said.

"I have played a fair bit with Harvey in Maitland rep sides, Hunta is a year younger so this was the first time we had played together."

The Australian Schoolboys

side goes into camp in September and Jenkins is hoping to have a premiership with Maitland under his belt by then.

"I went to the Pickers this year and I have loved it.

"I was at the Morpeth Bulls up to 15s when they folded and had a couple of years at Greta Branxton, but played more with the Knights Harold Matts and then SG Ball last year as an under-age player.

"I'm signed at the Knights but not training with the 20s at the moment. It's been great to get an opportunity in first grade at the Pickers."

—MICHAEL HARTSHORN