

## "A Bundy or Two"

### Round 10 & 11 Tooheys NEW Shute Shield - Eastwood & Penrith

After a couple of weeks of frustrating wet-weather football and a week's break, the Highlanders travelled out to the team based at the foot of the Blue Mountains. Your correspondent was not there, as he was 3,000 kilometres away in sunny Port Douglas.

Some may say that to attempt to write a report of a game that was not witnessed is silly, even fool hardy. However, as reports have been somewhat tardy lately, it seems only right that despite not seeing a minute of the game that all effort be made to prepare something.

The game against Manly (the report of which is now on the website) was truly in the balance all afternoon. In the last 5 minutes, Gordon had a number of opportunities to steal the win. However, due to a combination of slippery conditions and eager Marlins' defence, the Highlanders left the Village Green with a solitary point for finishing within 7 points. Manly remain the surprise packet in 2009, with only 2 losses to a very strong Sydney Uni outfit and the shock loss to the idiot sauvants of the competition, Norths, they turn at the halfway mark of the competition 9 points clear in first place.



The encounter against Eastwood at Chatswood on the following Sunday was lucky to go ahead. The volume of rain that had deluged Sydney in the prior fortnight, must have brought the ever-vigilant Willoughby Council very close to calling Dave Bezer to give the bad news that the ground was closed. However, the call never came and all grades from 5th grade got on the park. The most remarkable thing about the day was how well the surface held up with heavy rain continuing to fall throughout the course of the afternoon.

The game was keenly contested and Gordon were first to score, through an Eastwood dropped ball on the halfway line, which was toed through in the slippery conditions before being gathered by **inside centre Dave Alo, who scored to the left of the posts.** Dave Harvey, who had a below average day with the boot by his standards, missed a conversion, which on another day he may have slotted.

Points were at a premium on a wet day and against a Woodies team that had welcomed back some serious Super 14 talent in Chris O'Young, James Foote and Matt Dunning. Unfortunately, the Highlanders gave the initiative straight back as Kingsley Seale misjudged the kick off and the ball slipped through his grasp. Eastwood secured the ball and stormed to the line and scored.



**Eastwood's pack was formidable** and despite the muddy conditions

took the points over a Gordon pack that to that time had not been bettered in 2009. The game finished 3 tries a piece at the end of the game; but Eastwood took the points through the exceptional kicking of five eighth Foote as they ran out 24 - 17 winners.

The disappointing aspect of the game was that all of the visitors' points came through their hosts' mistakes and a healthy chunk of good fortune with any desperate blue and white boot thrown to ball invariably putting the visitors into a commanding position. The obvious point is that Gordon provided all of those opportunities through an inability to hold onto the ball. Of course that is often the price of playing an expansive game in the wet.

When the Highlanders kept the ball in hand and put phases together in the second half they scored the only tries in the game by either side that did not rely on loose ball and luck, through scores out wide to Matt McDougall and Nath Nicol. However, it would be unfair to characterize Eastwood's win as lucky. They played a tight game in the wet, which was set up by a dominant forward pack and a first class performance from 9 and 10.

### **Vinnie Byrne tries to jink through.**

Less impressive was Eastwood's skipper Hugh Perrett balking at skolling from the Allan / Millner Cup, which the two teams play for, at the post-match function. Brett Papworth, on a rare occasion that he could watch his beloved Woods play, and on a rarer occasion that he didn't



have to work, needed no invitation to step in to ensure that blue and white pride was not wounded. Another difficult result to accept in less than ideal conditions; but the Highlanders could only look forward to the last round of the first half of the competition.

The eleventh week of the competition, the last for the first round, sent the Highlanders out along the M4 to St Mary's Leagues Rugby Park. It is a ground that claims to have the closest schooner to the sideline in the competition; but a claim that is vehemently denied in Woollahra.

As alluded to earlier, it is difficult to give an accurate report on a game played at a time when your author was several thousand kilometres away watching the Port Douglas Reef Raiders secure their first home victory for the season against the lime green of the Cairns Wanderers. That encounter, in 27 degree heat, did not put a huge amount of stock in the set piece and instead threw to the flanks at every opportunity.

Bizarrely, the game was delayed as the ball was carefully retrieved from a crocodile-infested creek adjacent to the ground. It was reassuring to learn that players are the same the world over and the victory was celebrated by diving for a cold can of Tooheys NEW, which was curious for a game contested in Far North Queensland. The score at St Mary's was 15 - 10 in favour of the Highlanders, before the visitors ran away with the game to the tune on 51 - 10. McDougall continued his impressive season with 2 more tries. Dave Harvey finished with 22 points as he scored a try and kicked 5

conversions and a 2 penalties. The try fest was joined by Paulie Tuala, Lachie Mitchell and Craig Thomas.

And so at the conclusion of the first half of the competition, the Highlanders are in third place, only a point behind Sydney Uni and 10 points adrift of Manly in first place. Whether or not the team would have taken that position if it had been offered at the beginning of the season is not within this correspondent's knowledge. However, it is certainly true that Gordon has had it chances to be leading the competition by a healthy margin at this point.

This Saturday Gordon welcomes the Two Blues of the Shire of Cumberland. It is a must win game, as the men in tartan seek to get their season back on track. Lamarn Ma'a joins Marty Plokstys and Terry Preston retains his spot on the wing ahead of Australian 7s rep Andrew Wiles and the cult of personality Greg Wade.

Parramatta have played some impressive games and have scored some very good wins, including disposing of Warringah at Rat Park. There are no easy games in this year's Shute Shield, which in a competition of a standard that has not been reached on such a consistent basis in the professional era, is a great sign for the grass roots of the game. However, with the quality of teams only increasing following the conclusion of the Super 14 this is a game that the Highlanders must win.

Make sure that you get down to the ground to support your team as they continue their quest to reach back-to-back semi final since the end of last Millennium.

See you from the Cedric Pike Stand.

Georgie McHugh