



BEARS GO DOWN IN GOLDEN POINT THRILLER

27 September 2009

A 35 metre field goal from Balmain Ryde Eastwood halfback Josh Lewis in extra time killed the North Sydney Bear's tilt at 2009 NSW Cup grand final glory at Leichhardt Oval on the weekend.

After yet another barnstorming run from Tigers strongman Willie Mataka, the clever playmaker positioned himself perfectly to land the killer blow.

The loss proved a disappointing end for the plucky Red & Blacks and their legion of supporters, who were cock-a-hoop at the news that leading non-bank lender Mortgage House has agreed to support the Central Coast Bear's bid for an NRL franchise in 2013.

Despite the heart break, the match started positively for the Bears, with Justin Hunt darting over for a 4-pointer after six minutes, following a period of sustained Bears pressure. The busy pivot converted for a 6 nil lead.

The Tigers hit back fast after targeting the Bear's right flank. North Sydney held for a time before Balmain winger Billy Callaway slipped across the stripe for a four pointer.

A short time later the Tigers were over again with centre Matthew Ryan beating the tiring North Sydney defence, after Mataka was again prominent for the Tigers.

In the 30th minute the Tigers rake Ryan Carr was able to use the goal posts to squeeze over, and after the Lewis conversion, the Tigers jumped to a commanding 16-6 lead.

With replacement John Kaifoto leading the way, the Bears bounced back fast. Beau Falloon made a customary dart from dummy half, which was followed quickly by a Hunt burst.

A lightning play the ball and space was created for centre Bladen Baird to touch down. This trimmed the Tiger's lead to 16 to 12 after the Hunt conversion.

Following the 10 minute break, the tireless Samu Wara was prominent in attack and defence, yet the Tigers absorbed everything the Bears threw at them.

Then at the 60th minute mark, winger Junior Rogica landed a telling blow after Tiger's captain Lee Bennett popped a miracle pass in traffic. This pushed Balmain out to a 20 to 12 lead.

By this stage, frustration and the swirling wind was causing tempers to fray and after a number of cautions, Tiger firebrand Al Schirnack found himself in the sheds for 10 minutes.

Schirnack's stupidity allowed the Bears back into the match and soon after Curtis Johnston scored a good winger's try, after smart lead up work from Hunt and Wara.

Hunt wasn't done and soon after forced Balmain fullback Sean Meaney into touch after a smart kick into the Tigers 22.

The Bears won the scrum, and quick hands allowed centre Greg Nichols to get on the outside of the Balmain cover to help tie the game at 20 all. Unfortunately, Hunt couldn't to land the long range conversion.

The exciting game went into overdrive with both hookers Falloon and Carr trying their very best to secure a result in regulation time.

However the helter skelter failed to produce a result and the match was forced into extra time and more heart attack action for the enthralled fans.

Both sides had field goal chances, until Mataka went on his rampaging charge and Lewis was able to seal the deal and the Bear's fate for 2009.

BALMAIN RYDE-EASTWOOD 21 (Bill Callaway, Mathew Ryan, Junior Roqica, Ryan tries, Josh Lewis 2 goals and a field goal) defeated NORTH SYDNEY 20 (Justin Hunt, Bladen Baird, Curtis Johnson, Greg Nichols tries, Hunt 2 goals) Halftime 8 all.

PICTURED: Johny Kaipoto proves a tough man to bring down. Photo by Steve Little.

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