



Vs



★ MID SEASON COLLISION ★

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Hammond fights his way back

By Andrew Johnston

■ RUGBY LEAGUE

HIS return to the field is set to provide a major boost for a Queanbeyan Blues side already flying high on top of the Canberra Raiders Cup table.

But in the lead up to this weekend's local derby against the Queanbeyan Kangaroos, injury plagued hooker Jordie Hammond has spoken of his frustration at having to fight his way back from the third season-ending injury of his career.

And Hammond acknowledged one more serious knock would likely see him turn his back on the sport for good.

Last weekend saw the talented rake return to first grade for the first time in eight months after requiring surgery on a torn Anterior Cruciate Ligament in his right knee.

Hammond emerged unscathed from Queanbeyan's 42-12 win over the Tuggeranong

Bushrangers and should he stay fit, will form a key component of his side's title charge.

But given his track record of injury concerns, it's no cliché to suggest the 25-year-old will be taking things one game at a time as he attempts his latest comeback to the park.

Hammond suffered a similar knee injury as a 17-year-old while part of the Canberra Raiders development program before missing the entire 2010 season with a torn pectoral muscle.

In 2011 the dummy half was plagued by knee problems after dislocating his kneecap before tearing his ACL for a second time last season.

"One more major injury and I think I'd hang up the boots," Hammond told *The Queanbeyan Age*. "I was out of work for three months with the last one and I don't think work would be too happy if I had to have another few months off."

"If anything, I couldn't afford to have the time off again. It does get harder

each time to get back on the field as well.

"Getting your fitness back is probably the biggest thing. I was blowing a bit on the weekend but the knee pulled up well so fingers crossed it stays right for the rest of the year."

For the moment, Hammond's primary concern is regaining his match fitness after such an extended period on the sidelines.

The former Canberra representative hooker slotted straight back into the Blues starting line-up last weekend after an injury to fellow rake Josh Chudleigh.

And Hammond will don the number 9 jersey again on Saturday when the Blues take on the Kangaroos at Seiffert Oval.

"It's worked out well actually, getting back just in time for the Roos game," he said. "We played a trial match against them at the start of the year and it was like a regular season game, it was pretty physical out there."



Queanbeyan Blues hooker Jordie Hammond is tackled during his side's 42-12 victory over the Tuggeranong Bushrangers last weekend. Photo: Andrew Johnston

Battle of the packs to decide outcome

By Andrew Johnston

■ SIDELINE EYE

BOTH sides boast some flashy outside backs but it's the battle of the forward packs that will decide the outcome of this weekend's local derby between the Blues and Kangaroos at Seiffert Oval.

The Roos pack, led this year by firebrand prop Matt Lewis, has been noted for its aggression in recent seasons.

Along with Lewis, backrower Adam Pearce and lock Troy Whiley are two blokes who don't mind mixing it with their opposite

numbers when given the opportunity.

And after missing last week's clash against Woden, Lewis and young forward Brett Solomon are set to be major inclusions for last year's grand finalists on Saturday.

Facing them across the halfway line this weekend however, will be a Blues side stocked with talent in the scrum.

Canberra representative forward Levi Freeman has joined former Canberra Raiders junior Mick Cullen in the Blues back-row this season and has made an immediate impression at

Seiffert Oval.

Up front, Matt Holmes has been in superb form while marquee signing Trevor Thurling has the potential to turn a game on its head singlehandedly at this level of competition.

The only issue will be Thurling's level of fitness with the 100-game NRL player battling niggling knee injuries so far this season.

If the Blues do win the battle through the middle, their backs led by five-eighth Marc Herbert and try scoring machine Tyler Stevens would seem to have one up on their opponents.

The loss of English centre Josh Atkinson for the season to a knee injury is a massive blow for the Kangaroos who will now be more reliant than ever on strike centre Robbie Byatt in the three-quarter line.

The big question that remains is whether Roos captain Aaron Gorrell can re-find his best form after being at less than 100 per cent so far this season since returning for a long lay-off.

If Gorrell fires, it could get the Kangaroos over the line but if not, the Blues may just have it over their cross-town rivals in this one.



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