



Queanbeyan Kangaroos reserve grade co-coach Mark Hogan says a change in team culture has been behind the side's run to this year's grand final. Photo: Andrew Johnston

# Young Roos set for final stage

By Andrew Johnston

## RUGBY LEAGUE

**Canberra Raiders Cup Under 18s grand final**

**Who:** Queanbeyan Kangaroos v Gungahlin Bulls

**Where:** Seiffert Oval

**When:** Sunday, 10am

AT the start of the season, Queanbeyan Kangaroos under-18s coach Jack Giddings wasn't even sure if his services would be required.

Struggling for numbers and with the club having endured a dire under-18s campaign last season, Giddings had his work cut for him simply to get a side on the paddock.

"It certainly wasn't easy getting a team together," Giddings said.

"With my manager Peter Sullivan and the help of Leigh Kiely and Janelle Bergkotte from the club we got names and addresses and phone numbers of potential recruits and just started ringing around.

"We started off with a small group of about eight or 10 players in the early days but we eventually got a side together and they've turned out to be a pretty handy squad."

And on Sunday, the Kangaroos will have the opportunity to cap what has proved a remarkable turnaround this season when they take on the Gungahlin Bulls in the under-18s division two grand final.

The Roos will head into the clash with plenty of confidence having seen off their grand final opponents 34-26 in the semi-finals just two weeks ago.

But with all three matches between the two sides this year having proved closely-fought contests, Giddings said there had been little to separate the two teams all season.

"We're going to have to work hard on our edges because they've got a couple of good centres who've given us trouble whenever we've played them," he said.

While Giddings said it was no secret the Kangaroos would look to use their strength through the middle to overrun the Bulls pack, the young Roos will also be able to boast plenty of strike power in the backline.

Giddings will be able to call on the services of the competition's top point-scorer and joint best and fairest in centre Simi Latu, while he also reserved particular praise for captain and five-eighth Brendan Baxter.

"Brendan's been outstanding for us," Giddings said. "He's got a cool head and he works well with the referees which really does help because a few of our boys are pretty fiery."

# Culture change the key

By Andrew Johnston

## RUGBY LEAGUE

A CHANGE in team culture has been the catalyst for the Queanbeyan Kangaroos' first reserve grade grand final appearance in nearly a decade.

That's according to co-coach Mark Hogan who says the Roos' resurgence in the grade can be attributed to a new found commitment to the jersey.

The Kangaroos will square off against the Queanbeyan Blues in Sunday's decider as the club goes in search of an historic 'threepeat' of all three senior grade titles in the same year.

Coincidentally, the last time the Kangaroos made a reserve grade grand final was against the Blues in 2004.

Since then however, the club has struggled to prove a force in the grade with Hogan admitting a shake-up had been required this season to get the side back on track.

"We've struggled for numbers [in previous years] in reserve grade and a lot of blokes weren't turning up to training and still getting a game," Hogan said.

"Our main aim this year was to change that attitude and to really enforce the idea that everyone playing reserves should be there to play first grade.

"Since we've been able to do that it's paid dividends. We've now got a really tight group of guys who want to play for each other and the result speaks for itself."

While the Kangaroos have

turned history around to progress to this year's decider, their recent form line against the Blues suggests they'll be at long odds to claim a long-sought reserve grade title.

The two previous clashes between sides this season have resulted in comfortable victories for the Blues who will head into Sunday's clash on a 15-game winning streak.

"We'll have to play pretty much perfect football so it's going to be a big ask," Hogan acknowledged.

"Our completion rate killed us in our last two games [against the Blues]."

"We turned over too much ball and they took advantage so that's something we'll definitely have to address."

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**Wishing The Roos all the best in the Grand Final!**

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