



# Blues look to tackle grand final challenge

By Andrew Johnston

## RUGBY LEAGUE

IF there's one thing Queanbeyan Blues reserve grade coach Ronnie Hoare hates on the footy field, it's conceding points.

So it's no surprise the minor premiers are basing their title charge around a rock solid defence that has been the cornerstone of the side's unbeaten run this year.

The Blues will take on cross-town rivals the Queanbeyan Kangaroos in Sunday's reserve grade grand final.

And based on their brilliant regular season run, will be heavy favourites to make it a second premiership in the grade in as many years.

The Blues are undefeated in 2013 having won 15 straight games en route to the decider, including a 52-10 demolition of Tuggeranong in the major semi-final a fortnight ago.

While the side has shown plenty of flair with the ball throughout its campaign - scoring 80 points in a match not once, but twice this season - it's at the other end of the field Hoare said his troops had excelled.

"I'm a very defensively orientated coach, I hate tries being scored against me and that

attitude was embedded into the team early on," he said.

"We've got a lot of penalties in place for any tries that get in, basically a lot of additional fitness work after training. They hated the first session of it and worked out pretty quickly that I was serious so they work hard on their defence.

"You can hear the talk on the field during the game, they're desperate not to let any points in."

Both previous matches between the Blues and Kangaroos this season have resulted in blowout victories for the Blues - a 42-10 victory at Seiffert in round six followed by a 40-12 win at Freebody in round 13.

But while they've proved the dominant force in this year's competition, Hoare said the Blues' impressive record would count for little if they failed to lift the trophy come Sunday afternoon.

"We're undefeated at this stage but we've got one game to go and none of that other stuff will count for much if we don't win this weekend," he said.

"That's what we keep reminding the boys but they're a pretty level headed bunch to be honest so I don't think they'll be getting ahead of themselves."



Queanbeyan Blues coach Simon Woolford knows expectations for the side are high heading into Sunday's Canberra Raiders Cup grand final. Photo: Andrew Johnston

# Great expectations

By Andrew Johnston

## RUGBY LEAGUE

BY any objective measure, Simon Woolford's first year in charge at the Queanbeyan Blues could only be considered a success.

Honoured earlier this week as the Canberra Raiders Cup coach of the year, Woolford has guided the Blues to both the minor premiership and Sunday's grand final against the Queanbeyan Kangaroos.

But Woolford himself is well aware that sporting success is never judged in such an objective fashion.

And he is under no illusions that the success or failure of his first season at Seiffert Oval would

be judged, fairly or not, largely on just 80 minutes of football.

"Come Sunday, no one cares that we finished top of the table or how many wins we had," he said. "The only thing people care about is the result on Sunday and that's just the reality of it."

"We're pleased by what we've been able to achieve this season but I won't be patting myself on the back before Sunday and I know the players won't be either."

Woolford acknowledged taking on such a high profile coaching position with the traditional competition heavyweights carried with it an inherent expectation of success.

Woolford's predecessor Adam Doyle was told his services would no longer be required despite taking the side to the finals -

including the grand final in 2011 - in both of his two years in charge.

"Of course that pressure's there," Woolford said.

"It's no secret the Blues are able to attract really good players but at the end of the day we took some risks this year. We let a few players go and brought a fair few new players in."

"There'll probably only three or four players in our grand final team on Sunday who were there last year."

"You look at our list and we've got three rugby union converts, one's finished the season as leading point scorer [Craig Wilkinson] and one's finished as leading try scorer [Tyler Stevens]."

"So it's amazing how well the team has been able to gel."

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