



Injuries eat into first grade

RUGBY LEAGUE

Sam Rigney

Rugby league will be back in Maitland on Saturday for the first round of the Centenary Cup.

The Maitland Pickers will clash with Western Suburbs in the pre-season competition, which celebrates 100 years of rugby league in the Hunter Valley.

The Pickers will complete their rounds of the pre-season competition against the Macquarie Scorpions at

Lyle Peacock Field on March 21.

The Pickers and the nine remaining Newcastle Rugby League teams will play two games each, with the top two ranked teams playing off in the Centenary Cup final, which will be held at Maitland Sportsground in conjunction with the Coast vs Coalfields representative trial.

But despite the chance at a home grand final, Pickers coach Noel Dent wasn't looking any further than this weekend and a tough match against Wests.

"I think Wests are going to be the side to beat this year," he said.

"They've got the quality in their personnel, but they've also got the depth so if they get a few injuries it won't affect them as much as it would us."

Dent said the Pickers were just looking to get through Saturday's match-up without incurring any more injuries to their already depleted first grade squad.

They will be without hooker Blake Birch and giant winger Willie Poleo,

who both injured knees in their trial matches at Forster.

The Pickers will be thin in the front row too, with Damien Frize (back) and Shane O'Sullivan (knee) both likely to miss a large part of the season.

Add to that dynamic dummy-half Jye Bayley, who broke his foot in December, and the Pickers' squad is starting to resemble the one that finished 2009 with several stars sitting on the sidelines.

Dent said the team would mix-

and-match some first graders with reserves.

"We just want to get through Wests without getting any more blokes injured," he said.

"But we'll also work on some combinations out wide.

"If we get a win then that's a bonus."

Kick off for first grade is 6pm, with reserve grade at 4.45pm and Presidents Cup at 3.30pm.

Entry to Maitland Sportsground is a gold coin donation.

Cant ties to club continue

RUGBY UNION

Josh Callinan

The Cant family has a history at the Maitland Blacks stretching back half a century.

In 1964 breakaway Tony Cant was presented with the Blacks first grade best and fairest award, during the 1980s his son Andrew Cant was a half-back for the Lorn club and now 11-year-old Jackson, the youngest of the trio, is playing juniors with Maitland.

And Jackson, son of Andrew and grandson of Tony, will lace up the boots for the first time in 2010 as part of the inaugural pre-season inter-club challenge hosted by the Blacks at Marcellin Park



HISTORY: The Cant family has a long association with the Maitland Rugby Club, with junior player Jackson, 11, following in the footsteps of his father Andrew and grandfather Tony.

040310SS078 Picture by STUART SCOTT

on Sunday. Jackson will play under-12s as teams from under-8s to under-17s and Singleton take part. The superior club on the day will receive the Tony Cant Real Estate Shield. Matches start at 9am.

Top four order hangs on weekend matches

CRICKET

Josh Callinan

Semi-finals have arrived a week early in the Maitland and District Cricket Association first grade competition.

Finals spots are assured for the top four teams but Raymond Terrace (40) and Western Suburbs (38) will be playing for second position on the ladder when they clash at Coronation Oval on Saturday.

The winner of the one-day encounter will be guaranteed second place behind minor premiers Northern Suburbs (45), while the loser of the round 14 match will be resigned to fourth if defending premiers City United (37) beat last placed Weston (19) at Robins Oval.

"We will be treating this one like a semi-final," Terrace skipper Graham Maytom said.

"We want to keep the ball rolling and put our best foot forward for the team."

Wests skipper Andrew Trappel agreed.

"We want to finish on a high and to finish second is a big bonus...but it will be a very tough game," Trappel said.

In other final round matches Norths host Thornton Park (22) while Tenambit Morpeth (29) and Eastern Suburbs (28) will battle it out for fifth place at Morpeth Oval. All matches start at noon.