



• The Tathra Sea Eagles, led by forward Ben Parsons (tackling), showed plenty of grit but couldn't overcome Narooma Devils.

Devils defeat gritty Eagles

Josh Bartlett

THE Tathra Sea Eagles will battle to keep their season alive next weekend after narrowly losing 24-22 to Narooma Devils on Sunday.

The side will take on Cooma Stallions at Lawrence Park to decide who will challenge the Devils in the grand final.

In a gutsy display Tathra came within striking distance of defeating the minor premiers when Josh Finucane missed a difficult conversion attempt from the sideline.

Narooma started the clash with great intensity and an early break up the centre led to Todd Ayres crossing out wide.

Half-back Clint Wright missed the conversion attempt but the Devils skipped out to an early four-point advantage.

The Eagles were forced to make plenty of tackles in the opening 20 minutes with forwards Tom Cryer, Wayne Searl, Malcolm Green and Liam O'Neill solid in defence.

The match had a lot of feeling and tempers overflowed after Michael Finucane made a late tackle on Wright.

Things got heated again just minutes later before Wright knocked on after repeat set pressure.

Tathra was looking in good form

with ball in hand and after the ball was spread wide winger Matt Heffernan was pushed into touch before he could score.

Heavy defence in the following set caused a turnover and Tathra's opportunity was extended further when they received a penalty.

However the Eagles' team structure took a massive blow when captain-coach Cameron Cook went down with a hamstring injury.

Another handling error relieved the pressure and consecutive penalties gave the Devils a golden chance which they capitalised on when Drew Houston dived over.

Fullback Pat Willis slotted the conversion and Narooma jumped out to a 10-0 lead.

Just minutes later a Devils' winger made a break up the middle but was cut down short of the line by Ned Cryer and Ben Parsons in super cover defence.

Unfortunately for Tathra their opponents scored a couple of players later on the other side of the field through Willis.

The conversion attempt was unsuccessful as Narooma took a 14-point lead into the break.

The match resumed with a tough battle but Josh Finucane opened up the contest when he broke through and was cut down just short of the

line. The final play saw a backline movement finish in the hands of Ned Cryer who scored in the corner.

Josh Finucane nailed the conversion and the Eagles cut the deficit to 14-6.

Tathra continued to attack and finally managed to crack Narooma's defence when centre Scott Chatfield dived over out wide.

Finucane's conversion attempt was successful again and the visitors trailed by just two points.

However Clint Wright changed the momentum of the contest minutes later when he smartly off-loaded to a runner in support.

Narooma spread the ball wide which led to Todd Bennett scoring but Willis' conversion sprayed wide.

The Devils' scored again during the following set when centre Lance Wright ran the length-of-the-field after beating his opponent out wide to score.

The conversion was successful and with around 20 minutes remaining Narooma jumped out to a 24-12 lead.

The game then went into end-to-end footy but the Eagles gained a golden opportunity on the back of a handling error.

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Craig continues rise



• Craig Matthews and Gadget successfully clear another gate during the National Pony Club Championships.

Josh Bartlett

LOCAL horse rider Craig Matthews successfully competed at the National Pony Club Championships in Sydney recently.

The week-long event was held at the Olympic Equestrian Venue at Horsley Park with Craig and horse Gadget representing NSW in both the individual and team competitions.

Each state and territory had four riders for the team's events along with six riders competing in the individual category.

Craig was joined by participants from Dapto, Ryde and Newcastle to represent NSW in the team competition.

After the completion of four events, NSW finished as comfortable winners.

Craig then backed up to participate in the individual competition winning with a point-score of 55 points.

His nearest rival from South Australia was 14 pts adrift.

The success comes on the back of being named Most Successful Young Rider at the Royal Easter Show in May.

The 17-year-old became the first member of the Bega Showjumping Club to be honoured as a champion at the show.

Craig said he enjoyed the opportunity to represent NSW.

"It was a good experience and it was a really good feeling to win," he said.

"I worked pretty hard and it's nice to see it pay off.

"It's been a pretty good year for me."

Craig said he had a great learning experience and made a lot of friends during competition.

"I had a good time and my mum and I are very grateful for the opportunity and thanks to Zone 14 and Bega Pony Club for their support.

"I look forward to my next competition."

Julie Matthews, Craig's mum, said she was proud of her son.

"It was a fantastic achievement and he did very well," she said.

"It's unbelievable how well he is doing and the hard work is paying off.

"Craig does try really hard and he is a very competitive person."

Ms Matthews said Craig will now step up into the next division of showjumping.

"That's as high as he can go in pony club and he has achieved all that he can at that level," she said.

"The next level is open company which he did at the Royal Easter Show in the U/21 division.

"He's stepping up from juniors into open company futurity and mini-prix which will be a lot more challenging.

"Craig will be up against opponents of all ages, unlike juniors where it was 25 years and under but he is excited about it all."

Ms Matthews said her son had a busy schedule in the next few months.

"He plans to do some more junior events at the NSW State and National Titles which are in Canberra in October," she said.

"He will use this as preparation for stepping up to the next level.

"Craig will then go to Victoria in November where he will start futurity and mini-prix events."

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