

John I Dent Round One

By Joshua Matic

Canberra Royals v Gungahlin Eagles, Phillip Oval

There is little doubting how influential ACT Rugby young star Tom Staniforth will be for his beloved Canberra Royals this John I Dent Cup season, having spent the offseason training with the Brumbies Academy.

The tall lock-forward was all smiles after his Royals 34-30 round one win over the Gungahlin Eagles, and was full of excitement knowing he was finally able to use the skills he had developed with the Brumbies at local level.

He said the Brumbies Academy was great in that he was able to train at a much higher intensity with professional, Super Rugby players, and there was always someone with more experience around to guide him.

“When you come back to club footy, you just take that stuff with you, and try and make improvements on your game,” he said.

“It was phenomenal. I was just lucky that they gave me the opportunity to train with them. I couldn’t be more grateful.”

Adding to his 2013 fortunes is his selection in the Australian U20’s side, which he will join in camp on Tuesday.

“I’ll put my best foot forward for the coaches and selectors, and I’ll just keep playing footy and see what they like,” he said.

Royals coach Russell Ingram has never doubted Staniforth’s potential.

“His back-to-back efforts have always been fantastic for a big guy,” he said.

Russell said Staniforth was key to his side winning scrums and tightening up the middle, and said he will be missed in round two when on representative duty.

Staniforth said his main role model at the Brumbies was fellow lock Scott Fardy.

Meanwhile, a late Joel Penders try against the run of play secured the Royals their opening round win at Phillip.

The Gungahlin Eagles entered the match with the major boost of Ruaidhri Murphy, who also trained at the Brumbies academy over the offseason, but a sloppy start saw them behind 15-13 at half time.

The forwards from both sides dominated early, testing their opposing defences and finding space through the middle of the park.

As both sides showed equality, a see-saw event transpired, with a brutal try to Gungahlin flanker Xavier Duffy followed by a charge-down-and-chase try to Royals skipper Craig McMahon from the kick-off who kept his side ahead by five.

This may well have proved to be a crucial play by the lion-heart skipper, as the Royals built on their lead.

Their momentum continued in the second half, and after Robbie Abel's intercept try, their lead secured to 29-13.

Eagles scrumhalf Sean Connochie then put on a display worth noting, putting Liam McCrath in for a try then making a line break and attracting a penalty which saw Ryan Goodall's try bring his side back within four.

Errors crept into the Royals' game, and the Eagles saw the benefits of a momentum swing.

Goodall's second try gave his side the lead by a point, ensuring a grandstand finish.

But the final blow by Penders completed an intense round one showcase.

Eagles coach Owen Finegan was disappointed with his side's effort, and said there were no standout players.

Canberra Royals 34 (Sutton, McMahon, Rolando, Abel, Penders tries; McMahon three cons; one pen) bt Gungahlin Eagles 30 (Goodall two, Duffy, McGrath, tries; Hawke two cons; two pens) at Phillip Oval.

Uni-Norths Owls v Eastern Suburbs, ANU North Oval

Eastern Suburbs broke a 22 month victory drought on Saturday with a 20-11 win over the Uni-Norths Owls at ANU. Easts have been their competitions easy beats in previous years, often going down by 50 points or more. Coach Jeremy Osbourne said that while his men were scrappy at times, they put their body on the line, and that was the key. "I think we were very scrappy, but we gutted out a good win and that's a good change for the club because it's probably something that's lacked over the last few years," he said. He was particularly impressed with veteran skipper Sam Shirley, whom he said was the game breaker.

Eastern Suburbs 20 (Guigny, Van Der Walt tries; Tago two cons; two pens) bt Uni-Norths Owls 11 (Garvey try; Irwin two pens) at ANU North Oval.

Byes: Queanbeyan Whites, Tuggeranong Vikings, Wests Lions.