

Shute Shield: Round 5 Match Previews

May 4, 2018

After four rounds, Northern Suburbs are the only undefeated team in 2018 and just one bonus point win separates third from eighth.

For the second straight week, a Shute Shield match will also be played in the country, with Easts travelling to Orange to play Parramatta on Saturday.

Randwick v Eastwood

Randwick missed the start against West Harbour and trailed by 30 points before they troubled the scorekeeper last weekend at Concord Oval, just seven days after producing one of their better performances of the season against Easts.

“We’re just struggling for consistency at the moment,” coach Owen Finegan told Rugby News.

“We’re back at Coogee Oval this week which is always a happy hunting ground but we need to improve on our physicality and skill level under pressure.”

Former Waratahs and Rebels centre Dave Horwitz made an appearance off the bench against the Pirates and will start at flyhalf on Saturday, before he departs to join Irish club Connacht later this year.

“He’s a quality player and brings a great level of experience and understanding of the game.

“His game management and communication on the field be a real positive for our young players I think,” Finegan added.

Eastwood overcame a 13 point deficit to claim an important victory over rivals Southern Districts at TG Millner last weekend in a match coach John Manenti said was crucial in the context of his side’s season.

“It’s such a tight comp at the moment, you just have to find wins anyway you can,” Manenti said.

“Souths have clearly been hit hard on the injury front, especially in the backs but before long they’ll be back to their best. We just had to take the opportunity that presented itself.”

Manenti has named a largely unchanged side to play Randwick, with just Ed Craig returning to the starting side to replace Hugh Roach.

“Randwick at Coogee are always a tough proposition. Owen has them playing well and no doubt they would have copped a rocket from last week’s game. We need to keep improving and show some consistency if we want to win this one.”

Northern Suburbs v West Harbour

Norths are the only undefeated side left in the competition after grinding out an impressive 32-26 victory over Sydney Uni in Bowral last weekend.

“We missed some opportunities to put the game away early in the second half and that was frustrating, but the maturity and composure shown late in the match was really pleasing,” undefeated Shoreman coach Shannon Fraser said.

Norths have lost both Will Miller and Cam Clark to the Waratahs ahead of this Saturday’s clash against West Harbour, which Fraser predicts will be his side’s toughest test of the season.

“West are a big confrontational side that play very direct. They have a team full of dynamic ball carriers and a strong set piece,” he said.

“We’ll need to win the battle up front and at the collision if we want to build pressure and convert that into points.”

Wests also head into round five full of confidence after a comprehensive bonus point win over Randwick.

“We defended really well last weekend. When we are playing well, we’ve got a far greater level of communication and intensity and we’ll need that this weekend,” Pirates coach Todd Louden said.

West Harbour jumped into the top six after their second win of the season last weekend but Louden said he expects things will be a whole lot tougher on Saturday.

“Norths are playing great rugby and Shannon has really added to their attacking play. They’ve been the most consistent side for a few years now and have plenty of talent right across the park, on both sides of the ball.

“We’ll need to be on our game for 80 minutes if we want to beat them.”

Warringah v Southern Districts

There don’t appear to be any signs of a premiership hangover at Pittwater, with Warringah sitting comfortably in the top three after four rounds this year.

“I still look back on that early loss to Norths with a bit of regret but we’ve played some decent footy since then,” Rats coach Darren Coleman said.

“We now head into a series of five consecutive games against teams with legitimate premiership aspirations though, so I think we’ll know more after that.”

The Rats were far too good for Penrith at Nepean last weekend, despite leaking an early try, and return home on Saturday to face a Southern Districts side that can’t take a trick at the moment.

“Souths will be hungry, they’ve got themselves in a lower position at this stage than I’m sure they were planning. But it’s a long season and as they show each year, they’re hard to beat when they get on a roll. We just want to make sure their roll starts next week, not this week,” Coleman said.

After impressing at Nepean last weekend, Rats back Harley Atwater has retained the No.15 jersey, forcing Coleman to shift veteran fullback Dave Feltscheer to the wing.

Southern Districts injury toll continues to get worse on the back of last weekend’s disappointing two point loss to Eastwood.

Halfback Eli Pilz will miss Saturday’s clash against the defending premiers and although 21-year old No.9 Liam O’Connor has been named in first grade, don’t be surprised to see former Australian Schoolboys Waldo Wessels make an appearance in the candy stripes, after stints with Gordon and Parramatta.

After beating Penrith in round one, Souths have lost three straight matches and will be desperate to get their season back on track this weekend.

Eastern Suburbs v Parramatta

After missing an opportunity to beat Randwick in the local derby, Easts proved to the remainder of the competition that they’re the real deal this year with an impressive win over Manly at Woollahra Oval last weekend.

“It was another grind of a game but I think it will give the guys a lot of confidence to know we can win tight matches,” rookie coach Pauli Taumoepeau told Rugby News.

While Lalakai Foketi and Tom Staniforth return to the Waratahs, Alex Newsome will start for the Beasties again this week. However Taumoepeau thinks defence will be the key in Orange on Saturday.

Parramatta also head into Saturday's clash in Central West NSW full of confidence after claiming their first win of the year against Gordon last weekend.

"I think that win was reward for the hard work we've put in over the last few weeks," Two Blues coach Paul Hardwick said.

"We looked at what we didn't do so well in the first three rounds and adjusted a few things in attack and defence last week so that we aren't just competitive in games, but we can win them." Despite that, Hardwick knows the challenge will be even tougher in round five.

"Easts are playing some very good rugby and they've got good players right across the park. We need to step up again from last week but I think the playing group are capable of that.

"The coaching staff are expecting a similar benchmark."

Easts and Parramatta will meet at Wade Park in Orange, with the match to be played after a Central West first grade grand final rematch between Forbes and Orange Emus.

Gordon v Sydney University

Gordon were disappointing in a 37-26 loss to Parramatta last weekend and scored two late tries to add some respectability to the scoreline.

"We fell asleep in the first 10 minutes of the second half and conceded three quick tries. It's very hard to come back from that in this competition," assistant coach Adam Hill told Rugby News.

The Highlanders are leaking over 36 points a match on average so far this year, something they'll need to fix before facing a Sydney Uni side that like to attack from anywhere on the park.

"We've spent a lot of time working on our defence so far this week. Uni are a great side, they're well drilled right across the park and have lots of experience in their ranks," Hill added.

The Students led late in the match against Norths in a top of the table clash in Bowral last week and missed an opportunity to put the match away according to coach Rob Taylor.

"The yellow card to Harry Potter really hurt us late in the game and Norths scored 10 decisive points in that time," Taylor said.

Sydney Uni remain in second after four rounds and while Taylor has been happy with his sides start to the season, the rookie coach still thinks there is plenty of room for improvement.

"We know we've got a quality side but we've got a few areas to sharpen up before we play our best rugby.

"Out set piece and accuracy will need to be strong this weekend."