



Small mercies from United courts

NETBALL
GIPPSLAND STARS
BY TOM HAYES

THE Gippsland Stars faced a harsh reality in Round 2 of Victorian Netball League action in both divisions, going down to City West Falcons.

Playing on the State Netball Centre courts last Wednesday (March 19), the Falcons showed the Stars they meant business.

■ **IN** the Championship division, the Stars were confident starters, holding pace with the Falcons, leading up until midway through the first term.

A five-goal to nothing run against the Stars turned momentum however, handing them a four-point deficit.

The momentum was so strong for the Falcons, that they went on their second five-goal run of the game, shooting back-to-back-to-back goals to end the quarter 11 goals ahead of Gippsland.

The Stars were just unable to keep up with the Falcons throughout the second quarter, as both sides endured chunks of scoring.

Missed shots were costly for the Stars, as the Falcons would take it up the other end and capitalise.

Halfway through the second term, after making three of four shots in a row, the Falcons opened a 16-goal lead. Minutes later, another five-goal to



Gun: Morwell's Chloe Radford, Gippsland Stars Under 23s best-and-fairest from last season, picked up the Player of the Match against City West Falcons in Round 2.

Photograph contributed

nothing run made the margin bleed out to 22 goals.

Stars' captain, Morwell's Daisy Hill made some late shots, but they were nullified, closing the half at a deficit of 22 goals, 41-19.

A seven-goal head start in the opening stages of

the second half would've just about put the game out of reach for the Stars, which then had the Gippsland side down by 28 goals.

With the margin continuing to rise, Stacie Gardiner made the final two shots of the third quarter for the Stars, giving some relief to the scoreboard. Nonetheless, 36 goals was the difference, 66 to 30.

Gippsland made some rotations heading into the last quarter, getting more minutes through to more players.

Competing until the very end, the Stars finished up their second Championship game in defeat to City West Falcons, 84-37.

Hill and Gardiner scored 22 and 11 goals each, both shooting at over 70 per cent. Meanwhile for the Falcons, Jane Cook scored 65 goals at a rate of 94.2 per cent.

Stars centre, Shannon Blackman, took out the Player of the Match award for Gippsland, in what would've been a busy night for the midcourter.

■ **THINGS** were much closer for the Stars against the Falcons in the Under 23 division, but still it ended in defeat for the Gippslanders.

It was a great start for the Stars, opening the early stages before dropping behind. It wasn't by much though, keeping within five goals of the Falcons until the final minute of the first quarter, ending the first term six goals down.

The game opened up a lot more for the Falcons in the following quarter, and it could've been much, much worse for the Stars toward halftime.

Down by 10 goals with four minutes remaining, the Stars made it a single-digit deficit once again before they couldn't get a handle of the ball.

The Falcons put up 10 shots to one in the final four minutes but only scored five. Regardless, the lead continued to rise for the Falcons, up to three goals by halftime.

Late runs of momentum stuffed the scoreboard for the Falcons, who dominated the third quarter, adding another six goals to their lead.

The Stars couldn't keep up from here, as the margin jumped into the 20s. Late shots going amiss saved some face for the Stars, but regardless they finished 22 goals off the pace, 59-37 at full time.

Morwell's Chloe Radford was named Stars Player of the Match for her relentless running throughout the Stars' midcourt.

All three Gippsland shooters shot double digits: Traralgon's Myah Healy (14 goals, 70 per cent); Drouin's Charlize Traumanis (12 goals (86 per cent), and; Traralgon's Grace Van Tilburg (11 goals, at 85 per cent) had some reason to smile afterwards.

Both Championship and 23/U division Gippsland Stars sides will take on Geelong Cougars, again at the State Netball Centre tonight (Wednesday, March 26).

New coaches ready for Gippy netball campaign

NETBALL
GIPPSLAND LEAGUE
BY LIAM DURKIN

THE Gippsland League's two most successful netball sides from recent years also happen to be next door neighbours.

Moe and Morwell have shared the last five A Grade premierships, and along with Traralgon (premiers in 2015 and 2017), the Latrobe Valley has become a netball powerhouse across the last decade.

The head-to-head between Moe and Morwell since 2018 is currently 3-2 in favour of the Lions, who have also won the last two flags.

Moe looks every chance of competing for a historic three-peat this season, a feat yet to be achieved in Gippsland League netball.

The Lions have retained virtually their entire premiership squad, with defender Emma Sculley the only absence due to pregnancy.

Coming into the side is goal shooter Ashlea Mawer.

If giant Warragul shooter Emma Ryde was recruit of the season last year, Moe might have just topped her as the biggest signing the league has ever seen.

Mawer is a six-time Tasmanian Netball League MVP, and understandably, is coming to the Gippsland League full of hype.

Newly appointed Lions coach Alex Moody wasted no time once she heard Mawer was crossing Bass Strait, getting her signature to suit up for the Lions.

With Mawer and Alex's younger sister Georgia under the post, Moe has two Victorian Netball League players shooting for goal, not to mention fellow VNL players Ramayer Gourley and Olivia Barnett at the other end.

On paper at least, the Lions are looking very formidable. One Gippsland League official even went as far to say Moe will likely be the strongest netball team in country Victoria this year.

Morwell however will be out to provide strong opposition, especially after a rare finals miss last year.

The Tigers have their own players with VNL experience, including Gippsland Stars goal shooter Daisy Hill, and young gun Jayde Parsons.

Parsons has been recruited from Heyfield, while Hill (also the Stars' Championship captain) makes a welcome return, as does defender Tanya Budge following an unfortunate ACL.



Promotion: Alex Moody has taken on the role of A Grade coach for Moe this season.

File photographs

Experience could be what sets Morwell apart from their contemporaries. Veterans Courtney Garth and Claire Marks are still going, and will no doubt want at least one more flag before hanging them up.

Marks steps in for her first season as A Grade coach, sharing the role with club favourite Rachael Patterson.

The Tigers have historically had an efficient netball program, so much so Morwell Football-Netball Club President Michael Stobbart has been on record as saying they "run themselves".

Moe will be wary of their opponents from just down the Princes Highway, who were described as a "very good local team" in previous seasons by a former Lions coach.

With Marks and Moody set to make their A Grade coaching debuts in a matter of weeks, *Express* journalist Liam Durkin touched base to see how they were going on the eve of the season.

Liam Durkin: Morwell certainly aren't short on experience, do you feel this will be one of the team's biggest strengths this season?

Claire Marks: We definitely hope so. Rach (Patterson) and I believe we have a great mix of players whose expertise and talent will mesh together well on the court. We are also excited to have a lot more depth in the team across the whole court which is something we haven't been as fortunate to have previously.

LD: With some quality players returning to the line-up it must give you great confidence knowing Tanya and Daisy will be under the ring at both ends?

CM: Yes we are very fortunate with all the players we have been able to retain and recruit this season. It is exciting for us as coaches to have options at both ends of the court that will be difficult for other teams to match up against.

LD: How is overall depth looking should the need arise for players to come up from B Grade?

CM: We believe the 10 players selected offer us a huge amount of depth, more than we have had in previous years. If the need arose we also have a number of players in our B Grade side with A Grade experience who would provide us with more options should we need it.

LD: Obviously great to have Pato back to support you as a first year coach?

CM: Absolutely. My coaching experience is heavily in juniors so definitely exciting for me to be able to learn from Pato as a very experienced coach. I've been lucky enough to be coached by her for a few years so to be able to coach alongside her now is super exciting for me.

LD: Moe are clearly looking like the team to beat, but you will hold no fear coming up against them?

CM: There is no denying Moe are a dominant side within the league and have set the bar very high. I think the introduction of the Gippsland Stars into the VNL competition has helped to strengthen a number of sides across our league, making a number of clubs more threatening than they have been in the past.

We are a pretty new team so we will just take each game as it comes, but yes, Moe will definitely be the team to beat!

Liam Durkin: Alex, coaching is always a big challenge but an exciting one nonetheless Alex?

Alex Moody: Definitely. I've coached before but haven't had the opportunity to coach the team I'm playing in. (I'm) fortunate enough to have quite a bit of support around me. The club has been awesome and our new netball coordinator Belinda Parise has also been a great addition and

sounding board. The girls are all really responsive and coachable which I'm grateful for, (which) makes my job slightly easier.

LD: What has preseason looked like? What has the emphasis been on?

AM: The girls are all looking super fit and training hard. Having so many VNL players has its obvious perks, but the downside of it is limited trainings we get to do together during preseason. Fortunate that this isn't the first and I'm sure it won't be the last year where we just do what we can as a group and get around each other through an online platform.

LD: Will you be looking to put your own stamp on things or just continue the work of beforehand?

AM: A bit of both. The last couple of years are hard to criticise when it comes to our performance. I'd like to implement a few different structures but by and large there isn't too much at this stage that we need to change.

LD: Will you be captain/coach or has a captain been appointed?

AM: I'll be captain/coach. I've got dad (Peter Moody) assisting me with the coaching part which will take a bit of pressure off me making all decisions whilst playing myself. He's obviously got quite a bit of experience and insight into coaching this level with winning the club's first A Grade premiership back in 2018. Ramayer (Gourley) will also still be a visible leader within the team despite her stepping back from the coaching side of things this year. I'm very open to any feedback/views she has of the game or any structures. She is a huge reason why our side has been so successful over the last couple of years. I've voiced to the girls each of us are leaders in different ways and I prefer coaching in an open space where everyone has an input into what we're doing if they're able to justify why. With the majority of girls being exposed to the VNL environment, they all bring a different background of skills and knowledge which is a huge asset to our learnings week to week.

LD: The question on everyone's lips is just how good is Ashlea Mawer?

AM: We're super excited to have Ash at the club. She brings height and athleticism to our goaling circle. The addition gives our team more flexibility and versatility across the court. We think she'll be a really difficult match up for any opponent in the competition.

LD: Are you expecting Ramayer will move back to defence, probably where she is best suited?

AM: Ideally that's our plan going forward now that we have Ash to fill the goal shooter role, however Ray will still float down to the attacking end occasionally if we need to switch things up depending on performance but also our opposition. For Ramayer to be able to play both ends at this level shows the calibre of the athlete she is.

LD: There is a chance for you guys to create history with a three-peat; how much of a motivating factor is this?

AM: It's something we've spoken about and the very real prospect of being able to do so is exciting for all of us. I'd say it's a motivation, but as we all know it's a long season so we'll be motivated week to week rather than the long term goal for the time being.

LD: You would be well aware there will be pressure of a different kind given you are expected to win every week?

AM: To be honest it's not different from last season for us. The focus each week will be executing our game plan as a team and then our role as an individual. We try not to buy in too much to the talk outside our group - every team in this comp has the ability to beat us if we aren't switched on, which we're well aware of going into each round.

LD: There seems to be a very tight bond between the Moe players?

AM: There definitely is. We've maintained pretty much the same playing group for four seasons now, going into our fourth which is evident in our performances over the last two years especially. (It's) a huge benefit on the court when we all get along off the court too. We socialise together in our own time and some of my greatest memories as a player are with this team and our B/C Grade girls on our annual trip away. A fantastic bunch of people!

LD: Finally, how's Georgia going to go taking direction from her older sister?

AM: Haha, I knew this question was going to be asked at some point. Honestly, I'll be seeking guidance from her throughout the year. She has a wealth of netball knowledge that I'd really like to tap into, especially when it's anything to do with goaling. She's been exposed to some of the state's best coaching so her insight is invaluable to us.



Plenty to offer: Claire Marks brings a wealth of experience to Morwell as A Grade coach.