

GEELONG Falcons coach Andy Allthorpe is still confident his side can have an impact in the TAC Cup finals despite dropping its final regular season game on Saturday. The Falcons will take on the Murray Bushrangers in an elimination final at Carlton's Princes Park next Saturday after finishing in eighth spot on the ladder after going down to premiership contender Dandenong Stingrays by 28 points.

Geelong led all game after making a strong start before being overrun in the final term as the Stingrays ran out winners 12.11 (83) to 8.7 (55) at Craigieburn. The Falcons were held to just two behinds in the final term while Dandenong, kicking with the breeze, slammed home six goals.

Falcons' ruckman Darcy Fort did not play out the match after suffering a corked thigh during the third term but Allthorpe said it was a precautionary measure to ensure he'll be right to take on the Bushrangers next weekend.

Geelong and Murray played twice during the regular season with the Bushrangers winning the first encounter by 34 points and the Falcons taking the points in a thriller in late June. "They've got good speed in the middle but I think we match up pretty well against them – and they'd probably say the same about us," Allthorpe said. "They like to be attacking and take the game on so we'll have to be good defensively." "We wanted to have a good hitout against quality opposition (on Saturday) and, while it was disappointing to lose, the boys focused straight away on next week.

"It's a fantastic effort (to reach the finals) when you think that the average age of our side is 17 (years old). The boys are playing the way that we want them to play." Allthorpe is pleased by the form of his key defenders Fraser Fort and Jye Cross heading into next week's cut-throat final. "They've become really solid and reliable down back," Allthorpe said.



Tom Gribble (#24) in action vs Dandenong



James Tsitas (#16) fires off a handball vs Dandenong

Photos: Courtesy of Brian Bartlett Photography

The Falcons were well served by midfielders James Tsitas, Tom Gribble and Daniel Watson on Saturday while Tom Batarilo was lively across half-forward. It's the 10th straight year that the Geelong Falcons have qualified for the TAC Cup finals under coaches Damian Christensen, Garry Hocking, Paul Hood, Aaron Greaves and now Allthorpe.

Brad Green

SCOREBOARD

Geelong Falcons	5	4	-34	7	4	-46	8	5	-53	8	7	-55
Dandenong Stingrays	3	1	-19	5	7	-37	6	8	-44	12	11	-83

Geelong Falcons

Goal Kickers: D. Gardiner, Z. Sherman, N. Bourke, H. Goddard, J. Sharp, A. Christensen, D. Bond, J. Tsitas.

Best Players: F. Fort, J. Cross, J. Tsitas, T. Gribble, D. Watson, T. Batarilo.

Dandenong Stingrays

Goal Kickers: L. Whitfield 2, M. Rennie 2, W. Hartung 2, A. Scott, J. Calvert, J. Newman, L. Pierce, N. Newman, J. Bastinac.

Best Players: L. Whitfield, W. Hartung, R. Marks-Logan, R. Hill, A. Scott, L. Pierce.