

Knights Outsmart Falcons in Close Finish

GEELONG Falcons coach Andy Allthorpe says his side's seven-point loss to the Northern Knights in the latest round of the TAC Cup was a "good learning experience" for his players.

The Falcons suffered their second loss of the season, going down 13.10 (88) to 11.15 (81) against the Knights at Preston City Oval.

Allthorpe said a big focus heading into the game was not allowing the Knights uncontested use of the ball, but the Falcons let themselves down badly in that area. He highlighted the fact that the Knights took 104 uncontested marks for the game.

"We won the stoppages and we won the contested ball," Allthorpe said. "We made it a big focus going into the game to stop their run and their uncontested possessions. We knew that they played on the outside, but we let ourselves down big time in that area. "We were pretty poor defensively."

The Knights led by 19 points at three-quarter time after a strong quarter kicking with the breeze after scores were level at the main break.

The Falcons booted the first two goals of the final term in the opening two minutes to give themselves a chance of snatching victory. But a goal against the breeze by the Knights late in the term dashed those hopes.

Allthorpe said the second term, when the Falcons kicked 3.6 with the breeze, also proved costly in the overall result. "We just didn't make the most of our chances in that second quarter. We should have been three goals up (at half-time)," Allthorpe said.

"It was a good learning game. Our players learnt that if you're prepared to be defensive then the opposition will chip the ball around and find the free player better than we can do. "We learnt some lessons about how we need to keep the ball in our forward half better than what we did on Saturday. We got it in there but we let it come back out too easily."

Co-captain James Tsitas was the Falcons best, gathering 42 possessions, having 13 clearances and booting two goals. Billy Beardsell continued his consistent season. The 17-year-old had 22 touches playing as a small forward, but let himself down with his conversion in front of goal. He booted 2.5 for the game.

But Beardsell has now kicked goals in his last five matches and has 15 for the season from 11 appearances. Allthorpe said the 171cm small forward has some encouraging qualities.

"Even though he's bottom age, he leads the way in our tackle count and pressure acts and he's the barometer on how we're going defensively in our forward half," Allthorpe said of Beardsell. "He's got to fine tune a few things with his kicking but he's super competitive."

Joe Maishman, Fraser Fort, Jackson Nelson and Jacob Sharp also battled hard for the Falcons.

Despite the loss, the Falcons still sit two games clear on top of the ladder of their closest challenger the Eastern Ranges with three matches left before the finals.

The Falcons travel to Epsom Huntly Reserve next Saturday to take on the 11th-placed Bendigo Pioneers, who have won just three matches for the season. But the Falcons only beat them by nine points at Craigieburn earlier in the season.

MEANWHILE seven Falcons have been invited to attend October's AFL Draft Combine.

Top 10 prospect Lewis Taylor will be joined by Nick Bourke, Aaron Christensen, Darcy Gardiner, Fort and Tsitas all hoping to impress recruiters ahead of November's national draft.

Darcy Lang has also been invited to attend, but his recovery from a broken leg will stop him from carrying out any of the fitness work. However, he will still be able to carry out interviews with all 18 clubs.

Brad Green

SCOREBOARD

	QT	HT	3QT	Final Score
Northern Knights	4.3 (27)	5.4 (34)	12.7 (79)	13.10 (88)
Geelong Falcons	1.4 (10)	4.10 (34)	8.12 (60)	11.15 (81)

Northern Knights

Goal Kickers: J. Castagna 2, J. Short 2, M. Bontempelli 2, B. Lennon, K. Malone, S. Switkowski, K. Langford, L. Hunt, J. Turner, G. McDonagh.

Best Players: J. Turner, B. Lennon, J. Kalanj, M. Bontempelli, G. McDonagh, J. Iacobaccio.

Geelong Falcons

Goal Kickers: B. Beardsell 2, J. Tsitas 2, K. Spokes, M. Buchanan, M. Boag, N. Bourke, M. Thompson, A. Moloney, A. Hickey.

Best Players: J. Tsitas, B. Beardsell, J. Maishman, F. Fort, J. Nelson, J. Sharp.