

MATCH REPORT



HBE UNDER 15 vs Pennant Hills/Westbrook Demons
Elimination Final– 24/8/2025
Ern Holmes

The time had come for the biggest game our boys had ever played in for our fine club - a Grand Final Qualifier against local rivals Pennant Hills/Westbrook Demons. We had the earnt the right for today's fixture through our strong season and our huge Elimination Final win against North Shore Swans last week. There was a real feeling of nervousness but also one of excitement and pride as parents, coaches and players gathered together on the wet top oval for the warm-up.

The week leading up to today's game wasn't without drama. Sydney had been hammered with a week of relentless rain, ruining any plans for training. We also had Tyler and Ethan facing a nervous wait at the judiciary - a new experience for us all. Thankfully, the boys were both cleared to play and were taking their place in the line up today. In fact, watching the boys go through their pre-match routine in front of me, it struck me that this was possibly our strongest team we had fielded all year. Unfortunately, we were still missing Jake G and Tom N but we had some great inclusions in Jake S and Ronin - what a bonus to have the mad redhead back after such a long lay off. Obviously, having these two on the team sheet was a massive boost for the boys. A strong trio of 14s also complemented our line-up. Lachy, Andrew and Josh A were also here and ready for business. I was really looking forward to seeing what this team could do today.

Despite the shocking weather of the week, conditions were decent at Ern Holmes. The ground was still pretty damp but it was a long way from a mud pit. The sky was overcast and the temperature had dropped from the morning but there was no sign of rain. There was a bit of a breeze but nothing that would affect the game too much. You might say that the setting was perfect for some semi-final footy.

Time passed quickly in the lead-up to the match. Nick and Tim spoke to the boys, going through our match strategies and what we needed to do to get the better of our more-fancied opponents. There was a big crowd in attendance, mostly there for the home side but our HBE supporter crew gathered together near our bench ready to get right behind our side. The boys lined up ready for the bounce and soon enough we were underway...

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Almost immediately we were heading forward after some good clearance work from our mids. We had an early attacking chance but unfortunately Penno were the first to hit the scoreboard, grabbing a runaway goal. Our Eagles were undeterred, Josh W hit back almost instantly with our first with some skilful work in front of goals. It was early days and our boys were looking good but it was a great relief for me and probably others that we had already nailed a 6. There was a lot going on, play was frantic and I could barely keep up with it let alone write anything down when Ollie booted through another goal for our team! Following this, Henry got us straight back on the attack - our guys were looking focused. Henry got involved again with a strong mark and a great tackle from Ollie kept momentum going the right way. Despite the positive play, Penno somehow managed to slip away and kick their 2nd. Not long after the bounce to restart play, a useful clearing kick from Luke found Ollie. Some scramble in the forwards followed and Callum was able to find a bit of space and boot another cracker of a goal for us!

The play was competitive from both teams in this opening quarter. Just in front of the Eagles supporters contingent, our backs put on a bit of a show. Emmett, Jack R, Lachy and Henry combined well to get us out of trouble. We were looking strong but in a bit of a coach killer of a moment, the Demons got a goal in the dying seconds of the term. It was a hotly-contested quarter but a great start from our boys. 18 all at the first break.

Needless to say, the chat was positive from our mob in the short stint between quarters. Tim said a few words whilst Luke and Tyler fired up the troops with gusto.

Onto the second and the frenzied and tough play continued. A contentious call on Ollie gifted Penno a free. Henry marked their attacking kick to send it straight back our way. Tyler continued the fight in the mids, keeping the momentum going. I noticed Lucas flying high in the ruck contests and getting some good taps forward. Andrew was doing plenty of solid work across the park, Alistair was looking energetic and determined up front whilst Ethan went to war in the mids, taking no prisoners in his irresistible style.

We probably had the better of the play but scores remained locked up. With 2 minutes to go in the quarter, Penno broke the deadlock with a behind. They almost scored again but our backs defused it well. Right before the main break, some great forward scramble from Zach, Ronin and Jack A earnt us a free. Callum had a late shot but unfortunately the ball cannoned into the post. 19 all at half time. I was very impressed with the quality of play and the pure effort from our Eagles but I knew that the 3rd quarter would be a crucial one...

I was reassured when we started well in the third. Henry and Ollie featured again to get Callum an early behind. Tom C snuffed out a Penno attacking chance which gave Henry a chance to clear. Following this, we were able to lock the ball up in our forward zone for an extended period. Ollie benefitted from this and sent the ball Luke's way. He did the rest to score our first goal of the quarter! Just in front of us, Josh A made an excellent spoil and he sent it forward.

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Ollie and Jake S combined to give Josh W a chance which resulted in a valuable behind. Up the other end, Emmett did well again to disable the Penno attack. He kicked to Tyler who marked spectacularly. More tough stuff from Josh A and a super tackle from Jake S - it was all happening out there and most importantly it was happening for us! Lucas continued the outstanding play for HBE with a sharp intercept mark and a good spoil to keep it up the right end. All this great play resulted in Callum being awarded a free which unfortunately again hit the post but really every point was valuable at this stage. A rushed behind from Penno added to our growing total. We led 29-19 as we got ready for the final term.

The parents on the sideline were all about to lay a collective egg through nervousness as the boys fired themselves up for the last quarter. Here we go.... Our backs continued to bust their guts in the early stages, fighting the Penno onslaught with everything they had. Their efforts only resulted in a behind for the Demons. The ball eventually found its way down the right end through our solid play. Luke, Zach and Callum pooled their efforts to keep it locked down there. From this, Jake S kicked an absolute belter from the left of the goals. 6 points Hornsby! Penno had a chance after this and things were looking ominous but our backs got us out of trouble once again - Jack R, Emmett, Henry, Andrew and Tom C featuring in this particularly brave play. More great work from Emmett, Jack A and Ollie got us going forward again, Callum got on the end of it all and was unlucky with a behind.

We had a lead and time was running out for the home side but there was still time for them to pull it out of the fire. Just as they were finding a bit of momentum, Lucas halted their progress with a stunning intercept mark. He kicked to Callum who was able to mark not far from the goal square. He calmly slotted it through for another major for HBE! Frustrations started to boil over for the Demons at this point, Jake S receiving a free for their indiscretions and scoring another point for us. As Penno kicked out from their goals some crafty play from Josh W in the forwards saw us regain possession. From this Jake S received another chance... He didn't hesitate, booting the ball through the big sticks and sending the Eagles crowd into raptures! It wasn't over though, more forward pressure from Josh W and a ripper tackle in front of goals from Ronin gave us a kick right in front. The siren blew as Ronin lined up the final shot.... GOAL HORNSBY-BEROWRA EAGLES!! We had done it. We had beaten Penno in the Grand Final Qualifier, playing the best footy we ever had to run over them in the final term! Eagles win 55-21! What a result!

The Eagles embraced in front of goals, clearly happy with an amazing team performance. Every player was superb, all giving that bit extra to get us over the line. That was the best win I have ever seen but I know we have one more in us.... The team song was sung raucously and proudly - it was an absolute moshpit of happiness out there! Coach Tim pogoing in the middle like a punk at an early Sex Pistols show! Absolutely brilliant. Bring on next week, let's do it Eagles!

Final score - Hornsby-Berowra Eagles 55 Pennant Hills/Westbrook Demons 21

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Words - Greg Allan



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