

MATCH REPORT



HBE UNDER 17s vs Hills Eagles
ROUND 1 – 19/4/2026
Charles McLaughlin Reserve, Baulkham Hills

Conditions were perfect for our first fixture of the 2026 season. There wasn't a cloud in the sky, the temperature was warm but not stifling and the playing surface looked in immaculate condition. There's also something about a white picket fence that makes a ground look extra special too. Our opponents today at Charles McLaughlin Reserve were the Hills Eagles who I'm certain were formally known as the Hills Hawks. There's so many mergers and name changes in the AFL that it's hard to keep up. Whatever the case, I reminded myself to yell out "Go Hornsby!" and not "Go Eagles!" during the match.

Despite quite a lot of training and a successful trial match, the regular season had rolled around pretty quickly. Of course, the Mighty Eagles had come off their best season ever with a narrow loss to the North Shore Swans in last year's Grand Final. Word had got around about our success and improvement together with the fact that we're a club that thrives on inclusivity, professionalism and fun. Because of this, a steady stream of new recruits had chosen to represent our fine club this season. This time last year, I wrote about how I wasn't sure whether we'd have the numbers to make a full squad. From this we have turned into somewhat of a destination club where we are having to turn players away! All of these new players appeared to add a lot of quality to our already strong line-up. When you take into account the natural improvement of our original guys, the signs were looking good for a successful 2026. Still, it was U17's and the majority of our guys would be 'playing young' so I didn't know exactly what to expect. Either way, I was looking forward to finding out!

I watched the warm-up from the safety of the shade. The boys all looked taller and stronger - it was quite clear at this moment we'd come a long way from the early mornings of Auskick. The team was put through their paces as Tim and Nick pulled various players and groups aside to discuss their roles for today's game. It was a familiar scene but Rich and Ronin were notable absences - I hope they are still going to be a part of our team this year.

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Pre-match, our Eagles sat calmly on the hill listening to Nick and Tim's final instructions. In contrast, the Hills Eagles shouted and carried on in their nearby dressing room. It sounded like a drunken riot in there, I was hoping they were using up all their energy before the game had even started. After a delay, we were finally ready to take the field. The Hills Eagles ran onto the ground with Daddy Cool's "Eagle Rock" playing in the background. A classic Aussie track already ruined by the Manly-Warringah Sea-Eagles and made even worse by our opponents today.

In the very early exchanges, Hills had the better of the play. They kicked what looked like a goal but luckily one of our defenders got a touch on the ball to keep the score to a point. HBE hit back with an actual goal though to Jake S. Ollie and Aiden provided the lead-up play. From the ball-up, Ollie sent forward a great clearing kick involving Jake S, Tyler and Linden in further useful attack. At the other end, a Hills attack was stifled by Emmett and Will, keeping them to just another behind. From the ensuing play, Aiden marked from a perfect clearing kick, he found Jake S who sent another between the big sticks!

Not long after, Luke gained possession after some tussle in the middle and sent a beautiful kick Ollie's way. He marked it and hammered it through for another major! There was some great fight in the middle following this, I noticed Aiden, Sam, Will, Zach, Lucas, Jack A, Tom and Jake G getting involved. The first quarter was a tight contest but we probably had the better of play and the scoreboard showed this with a 19-9 lead.

Onto the 2nd and a handy tap from the ball-up put us on the front foot. Jake G ran onto the ball well and found Jake S who booted from a distance, registering an early behind for Hornsby. Following this, Aiden shut down a Hills attacking play with a ripper of a tackle, unfortunately they countered with only the defensive skills of Emmett stopping them from achieving a major score. Despite the efforts of our team, Hills were starting to gain some momentum and they kicked a good goal from a distance. From the following ball-up, Aiden was able to send the ball sailing to our forwards but Hills were able to repel Alistair and our other lurking forwards. Linden did well to send the ball forward again as did Jack R after earning a free from working hard in the backs. Ollie, Lucas and Henry worked the ball up the field but Hills were able to respond and again, Emmett saved us at the back. The ball was sent back up our attacking end with Hills grabbing control of the ball. Not for long though as an absolute stinger of a tackle from Zach regained possession for us. He found Will with his kick who sent the ball forward to Jake S who did the rest for a goal!

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After some scuffle in the middle, Tyler found some space and kicked to Josh W up front. The positive play continued with Jake S finishing off the hard work of his teammates for another 6 pointer. Jake G, Will and Sam also contributed well in the lead-up to Jake's goal. Following this, we grabbed 2 behinds, one from Luke and another from Ollie which crashed into the post. Lucas, Harry and Ethan kept up the fight with some strong play just in front of the HBE supporter group. They were cheered accordingly as the half-time siren went. Hornsby 34-17.

We began the third quarter with some more fierce defence from Aiden, reminding Hills that any forward entry would be met with stiff opposition. Henry also stopped an attacking play with Jasper adding to the effort, this kept Hills to just a behind. Tyler then got us on the attack adding another behind to our score. A free kick was earned on the far side of the ground with Jake S and Linden both marking spectacularly soon after, unfortunately another unlucky behind was the result. Jasper followed this with some more tough work, getting the ball to Jake S who kicked yet another goal for HBE after a 50m penalty. Things were looking good for us but Hills began to hit back, getting their first goal for a while as they benefitted from a bit of a lapse in concentration from us. An odd decision from the home boundary umpire gave Hills another shot at goal. Karma reigned supreme as the ball sprayed embarrassingly sideways.

Another behind from Linden added to our total but Hills countered with a goal as the clock edged closer to 3 quarter time. A solid forward tap from Lucas found a mystery player from Hornsby who kicked with precision to Linden who booted home a late 'coach-killer' goal. Sadly, Hills did the same to us with seconds to go before the break... Hornsby 50-40 with a quarter to play.

The 4th was underway and Hills got the better of the early exchanges, winning a tussle in the midfield then getting clear and scoring an early goal. They almost got another but Emmett, Ethan and Henry worked together to stop them in their tracks. However, the Hills momentum continued as they marked in front and kicked a major to take the lead. Emmett, Henry and Tom gave us an attacking chance with a length of the field effort with Will unluckily scoring a point on the end of it. Soon after, Hills were awarded a penalty - it was hard to know what for from where I was watching but luckily they only managed a behind which was then followed by another. Following this, our boys hit back with a strong period of attacking play involving Jake S, Josh, Ethan and Ollie but Hills somehow regained possession, booting another goal to extend their lead.

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The next 3 minutes of play was a ferocious battle in the middle as both sides tried their best to gain the ascendancy. From the endless scramble, Tyler found himself with the ball and kicked to our forwards. It was then our forwards' turn to get in there and fight for the footy! Lucas emerged from the scrum, snapping a super goal to give us a late chance. We were only down by 2 but Hills were able to compose themselves and get a behind. With hardly any time remaining we had to go the length of the field to try and snatch the win. We managed to send the ball down the wing for a distance until Hills got things under control and held on to secure the win. Frustration boiled over at our defensive end from our guys, giving Hills a penalty kick at goal after the full time siren to extend their lead.

Well, what can you say? There wasn't a moment in this match that wasn't hotly contested - there was no resting for either team at any stage. Hills were able to take advantage of a couple of short periods where our effort lapsed and our composure dropped. Still, it was an exciting start from our brave Eagles in our first match of Under 17s Aussie Rules. The reality is we were just a kick or two away from beating a very strong side and this will be a valuable learning experience for our group. See you next week, for some 'blood in the nostrils' Sunday night footy at the home of football - Rofe Park

Words - Greg Allan

Thank you to Belinda and Gloria who were a great help in identifying all the players during the match!

