

MATCH REPORT



HBE UNDER 14s vs Penrith Giants
ROUND – Sunday 26 April 2026
VENUE – Grey Gums Oval Cranebrook

Pre-Season

After a busy off season trade period the squad had settled and new team members (Louie E and Ewan H) welcomed into the eagles fold as well as Josh M returning from a sabbatical in Japanese rugby. As is seemingly tradition with this squad, the fracture clinic at Hornsby hospital had also been kept busy again even before a ball had been bounced.

After winning the flag in season 2025, the move back up to Division 2 had seen Eamonn, Craig & Russell hard at work launching covert takeovers of training grounds, extra fitness drills and a couple of tough trial games to get the boys ready for the challenges ahead.

Venue and Pre-Game

As we transition out of summer, every season always takes a few rounds for everyone to find their rhythm, and this was no different. The WhatsApp chat had seen more polls than a Queensland bi-election, confusion over fruit availability and ground location, cryptic Gifs and a lost mouth guard necessitating a sweep of the sidelines! (special mention to Julie Eccles for her eagle eyes in spotting said mouthguard). After deciding it was a good idea to ride her (non-motorised) bike to the venue, Liz underwent a quick tutorial on goal umpire duties and despite a level of trepidation bravely took on the role.

Not a venue we have journeyed to often, the playing surface at Grey Gums Oval was looking as lush and verdant as our beloved Rofe Park but confoundingly the canteen ran out of bacon and eggs before ball up and hungry attendees had to settle for a banana and coconut bread. Would never happen at Rofe but being located in rugby league heartland we might forgive the canteen manager for underestimating the size and appetite of the ravenous AFL crowd.

Game

Being Anzac Day weekend, a minute's silence preceded the game and we were finally underway in season 2026.

After some strongly contested play in the midfield and staunch defensive efforts by the eagles backline, the Giants finally broke through for a major and Liz's form with the flags was almost text book. The eagles hit back smartly however with Josh M extracting the ball from ruck and snapping truly for the first goal of the season for the Eagles in 2026. Shortly after Ryan O found space and showed his usual classy finish to see the eagles up **13-8** at the first break. The opposing goal umpires flag work was somewhat lacklustre.

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The second quarter was pretty evenly fought with the Eagles playing confidently and showing some dash and verve in transition play, with some slick handpassing and good team play leading to another goal to Ryan. Weight of possession saw a flurry of flag waving as the giants hit the scoreboard strongly several times before Onni clawed one back late to go into the main break with the score, after some deliberation confirmed as **29-27** to the giants.

More sustained pressure from the Giants in the third quarter saw a number of behinds (many of which the scoreboard operator seemed to miss) and a couple of majors but the eagles were up for the fight with a never say die attitude and good positional play returning a few behinds. A late surge down the far flank saw Otto in space in the forward 50 who maybe could've gone for goal but instead slipped a silky handpass into Archie running a good line to run through and goal unopposed. Not only was Liz flag work superior so was her arithmetic after further deliberation the $\frac{3}{4}$ time score was agreed as being **45-36** to the giants.

The fourth quarter saw a few lapses and some clean wins out of the middle feeding the giants key forwards who posted 4 goals. The Eagles effort could not be faulted however and Liam continued to compete fearlessly in the ruck which eventually led to a late goal by Ryan. **Final score 72-43**

Coaches and parents couldn't have been prouder of the eagles for their effort and sportsmanship and hopefully a confidence boost after seeing that that they can compete well in Div 2 against last minor premiers and grand finalists. Liam was rightly adjudged best on ground by coaches. Your scribe doesn't know all the boys names in the team but many commendable efforts across the park with special mention to Augie for his relentless repelling of opposition raids out of the back, Jake and Lewis for their classy ball distribution and decision making in the mids and first gamer Louie E for several good marks and strong running on the wings.

Goals: Josh M, Ryan O (3), Onnie B, Archie W.

Report by Neal McCarry



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