



1996 Round 1 Friday 22nd March Wollongong Showground



Western Suburbs 17

def.

Illawarra 8

Andrew LEEDS
Darren WILLIS
Brandon PEARSON
Kevin McGUINNESS
Ken McGUINNESS
Andrew WILLIS
Craig COLEMAN (c)
Steve GEORGALLIS
Chad HARRIS
Bill DUNN
Brent STUART
Ciriaco MESCIA
Jason DUFF
Jason AUSTIN
Paul SMITH
Darren BURNS
Damian KENNEDY

Fullback
Wing
Centre
Centre
Wing
Five-eighth
Half
Lock
Second Row
Second Row
Front Row
Hooker
Front Row
Replacement
Replacement
Replacement
Replacement

Brendan O'MEARA
Rod WISHART
Brett RODWELL
Paul McGREGOR
Fili SERU
Craig SIMON
Josh WHITE
Shaun TIMMINS
John CROSS (c)
Wayne RICHARDS
Scott ENGLAND
Dean CALLAWAY
Darren FRITZ
David COX
Brad HEPI
Adam BRISTOW

Tries Ciriaco MESCIA
Damian KENNEDY
Craig COLEMAN

Fili SERU (2)

Goals Andrew LEEDS (3) One field goal

Match Description

Illawarra: Full-back: B O'Meara; three-quarters: R Wishart, B Rodwell, P McGregor, F Seru; five-eighth: C Simon; half: J White; forwards: S Timmins, W Richards, J Cross (c), S England, D Callaway, D Fritz

Western Suburbs: Full-back: A Leeds; three-quarters: Ken McGuinness, B Pearson, Kevin McGuinness, D Willis; five-eighth: A Willis; half: C Coleman (c); forwards: S Georgallis, C Harris, B Dunn, J Duff, C Mescia, B Stuart **Referee: K Jeffes (Big League 22nd March 1996)**

Surely they can be nothing worse than sweating, straining and bleeding for 80 minutes, winning the first game of the footy season and then finding there are five other teams - who've probably spent the evening in the pub - level with you on the competition table. That's the reality Western Suburbs players faced after outclassing Illawarra at Steelers Stadium last night. Thanks to the madness of the Super League War, South Queensland, Auckland, Parramatta, Newcastle and St George will each be awarded two competition points because their Super League-aligned opponents intend to forfeit. But Wests' coach, Tom Raudonikis, holding two green cans as he addressed the media in the stadium locker rooms last night, reckoned he knew of something worse. Raudonikis had heard rumours that the ARL was considering redrawing the entire competition in two weeks if the recalcitrant teams continue their no-shows, making last night's win nothing more than another trial. "They are my points and no one is bloody taking them off me," the former Test half said. "Everyone in this room worked bloody hard for those points and we're not giving him away. I'll fight and fight to keep them." ... On one hand, some things never really change: A burly prop, Wests' Brent Stuart, knocked on from the kick-off. And a 34-year-old half back, Wests' Craig "Tugger" Coleman, engineered victory for his kids against Illawarra's by scoring a try and setting up another after the Magpies had fallen behind. Asked for his impression of a lacklustre display, Illawarra coach Alan McMahon answered in time-honoured fashion: "They were the best side on the night." But the ravages of the games half-baked schism were never far out of sight. The venue itself, while enthusiastically and reasonably well populated, was hardly comparable to last year's season kick-off at Ericsson Stadium, when players emerged from a wall of fire, followed by the roar of 28,000 Kiwi fans. ... The Super League war and financial reality seems to have taken their toll on the Steelers, too. Without John Simons' kicking and direction, Neil Piccinelli's tireless midfield work and Peter Johnston's intimidating defence, they had to rely on two second half tries by Fijian winger Fili Seru for a glimpse of victory. Coleman then turned the clock back to score himself and send forward Damien Kennedy over, putting matters to rest. Raudonikis, whose side led 6-0 at half time, praised centre Brandon Pearson, who ignored a pinched nerve in his back to star. But everywhere, in both dressing rooms, there was uncertainty. Wests play Super League-aligned Brisbane next week and Raudonikis had no hesitating in predicting, "There's another two points for us." .. (Sydney Morning Herald 23rd March 1996)

Notes: Craig Coleman (ex-Souths/Gold Coast), Chad Harris, and Jason Duff all made debuts, Coleman getting out of a sick bed and being an inspirational captain in the place of Paul Langmack. The match was played under the Super League cloud, with five teams forfeiting and the possibility of a re-draw, robbing Wests of their two competition points. Brandon Pearson, playing with a pinched back nerve, was Wests' best while Bill Dunn up-front and Andrew Leeds at the back, were both very strong performers.