

# Lightning runs out of steam in opener

**BOTI NAGY**

ADELAIDE Lightning ran out of steam in a gritty 72-94 road loss to Melbourne to open its WNBL campaign.

Starters Leilani Mitchell, Mikaela Dombkins, Kelly Bowen, Jess Bygate and Mikaela Ruef put the Boomers to the sword early, surprising them and the 1411 attending at the State Basketball Centre with their intensity and desire.

Twice in the opening period, they scoured offensive rebounds off missed free throws — an opposition coach's nightmare — turning them into baskets. First it was Ruef following her own miss, then feeding Bowen for a bucket and 11-7 lead.

Then Mitchell, the smallest player in the game, secured a rebound off a Bygate free throw miss, Bowen again the beneficiary to bump the buffer to 14-7.

A rare triple by Jess Good gave Lightning an eight-point edge at 21-13, the plucky visitors still ahead 32-27 with 7:53 left to half-time.

Melbourne's Tess Madgen (23 points, nine rebounds, nine assists), Alice Kuneke (16 points) and centre Elyse Penaluna (26 points, nine rebounds) then were instrumental in peeling off the match-winning run, a 17-0 outburst for a 44-32 bulge Adelaide could not deflate. It wasn't through any lack of energy or effort though, a terrific Mikayla Pirini steal leading to a Mitchell basket to be within sight 40-50 at the main interval.

Lightning could not trim it any closer than eight though and, tiring in the face of a massive 48-29 boards disparity and shooting 36 per cent, an opening road upset was never on the cards.

Adelaide on Saturday hosts Sydney which also started with a road loss last Saturday, to the Lynx in Perth.



**MISSING DRIVE:** Kenyon McNeaill gets to the basket past Perth's Jesse Wagstaff in his 8:40 of action. McNeaill's injury has diminished Adelaide's running game. Picture: SARAH REED

# McNeaill injury a huge hit for 36ers

**BOTI NAGY**

JUST two games into the 2015-16 NBL season and Adelaide 36ers already are under the pump with the shoulder injury to import playmaker Kenyon McNeaill.

The talented playmaker with lightning quickness, massive "hops" and three-point range, has been hampered by a right shoulder injury suffered during the dunk competition at the pre-season Blitz tournament.

He showed his NBL bona fides at the Blitz with 16 points and three assists, winning his head-to-head battle with Melbourne United's exciting new playmaker Steve Holt, the eventual Ray Borner Medalist. He had 19 points with 5-of-8 threes as Adelaide blitzed Sydney too.

But after injuring his shoulder, McNeaill was unable to train ahead of Wednesday's 90-71 win over New Zealand, playing just 5:27 and in discomfort. The 36ers played so well, his absence wasn't nearly as pronounced as it proved against Perth, most acutely when the Wildcats ran off 16 straight points from 63-63 with 4:45 left at Adelaide Arena on Saturday.

McNeaill played just 8:40 and, even in that time, showed how important he would be if fit. The question for Adelaide now is how long can it wait in a

competition as fierce and as tight as this season's NBL?

"I don't know," 36ers coach Joey Wright said when asked when McNeaill could again be expected to be at the level he showed last month.

Away to Melbourne on Friday, then with games on consecutive nights in different states against Cairns and Sydney the following week, the 36ers cannot afford to drop off the pace.

They were exposed by the Wildcats who hammered them 50-36 on the boards, the run McNeaill can generate sorely missing, fellow import Ebi Ere starved of the ball in crunch time when he is most effective.

"Defence stops when rebounding starts," Wright said.

"We missed a lot of lay-ups and a lot of open shots."

Wright said he was unsure whether Nathan Jawai's keyway presence intimidated his team - he certainly negatively influenced much of Adelaide's decision-making - because "he wasn't always out there."

"We missed six lay-ups in the second half and gave up 25 second-chance points," Wright said. "We only had two guys (Daniel Johnson, 18 and Mitch Creek with 13) in double figures. That's never happened while I've been here."

"Our goal is to hold a team to 20 or less a quarter."

Perth scored 79, so that's not where the game was lost.

# Hayne set to wing it

**PETER MITCHELL**

JARRYD Hayne's special teams co-ordinator has an interesting take on why the Green Bay Packers kicked away from the former Parramatta Eel last weekend.

The consensus among media and some San Francisco 49ers veteran players was Hayne was viewed as such a threat as a punt returner that Packers' punter Tim Masthay opted to kick to the sidelines rather than to the Aussie.

"I don't know if that was quite the case," Thomas McGaughey, correcting the view, told reporters.

McGaughey, a nine-year veteran NFL special teams co-ordinator, put it down to Masthay having an inaccurate day with the boot. "I know the



**TEST:** Jarryd Hayne, and his 49ers, face fellow Aussie Brad Wing, and his Giants, today.

punter struggled a little bit and had been struggling," McGaughey said.

Hayne won't be facing a struggling punter today, (from 11am) when the 49ers take on the New York Giants at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey.

He'll go head-to-head with another Aussie, Brad Wing.

The Victorian punter, raised playing Aussie rules, has been a sensation since traded from the Pittsburgh Steelers on the eve of the regular season.

# Sport SA's Mr Wright

**REECE HOMFRAY**

SPORT SA has finally found Mr Wright. Michael Wright, a former SA minister for recreation, sport and racing, has been appointed as the new president of Sport SA.

Sport SA's chief executive Jan Sutherland says Wright will drive the body forward.

"Michael brings a wide range of skills to the leadership role through his knowledge and experiences," she said. "He has an excellent understanding of the South Australian sporting landscape, including the challenges and issues, and I am looking forward to working with him for sport."

Wright is also listed as a board member of Football Federation SA. He replaces John Dicker APM, who retired from the board.

# O'Keefe leading from the front

**REECE HOMFRAY**

AFL premiership player and Norm Smith Medallist Ryan O'Keefe is used to leading from the front on the big stage.

So it won't be a surprise if he spends plenty of time on the front of the peloton when he leads a charity ride from Adelaide to Melbourne which began yesterday.

O'Keefe is among 13 riders tackling the inaugural event dubbed Road Raise, which aims to raise funds and awareness for CanTeen.

Now an Adelaide Crows assistant coach, O'Keefe has been riding 400km a week in preparation for the six-day, 970km journey.

"I might have to drag a few of our riders along, I'm not sure how much everyone's



**OUT IN FRONT:** Ryan O'Keefe in the centre with CanTeen members Mark Haseloff, Sarah Sturm, Amelie Peters and Tyson Martin. Picture: TRICIA WATKINSON

been doing training-wise but that will show on the second and third day," O'Keefe said.

"I always was a cyclist while I played but since I've stopped playing I've been able to take it a fair bit more seriously."

"And moving to Adelaide, the cycling capital of Australia, it's been fantastic."

O'Keefe played 286 AFL

games with Sydney and in its 2005 and 2012 premierships.

He said he was only too happy to take part in Road Raise, which marks the 30th anniversary of CanTeen forming. "I've been committed since they approached me a long time ago. It should be really good," he said.

reece.homfray@news.com.au