

Cats hope to make most of ninth life

NICK WADE

FOR a fleeting moment last week, Geelong players thought their finals hopes were dashed.

One by one they filed into the changerooms at Etihad Stadium and found their own spot to sit, head bowed, the clunk of footy boots echoing in the silence.

Harry Taylor sat alone, his back against the wall of the medical room. Jed Bews did the same, a few metres along. Josh Caddy limped gingerly with an ice compression pack

on his knee, so too Cam Guthrie.

This wasn't how the script was meant to play out. No one expected the Saints to come close, let alone force a draw.

It felt like a losing final and given the Cats' delicate ladder position it almost was.

But there is still a pulse.

"Probably most of us thought it wasn't enough to keep going," captain Joel Selwood said yesterday.

"We all felt a bit heartbroken, but once we got our head around it, we knew the

two points were enough to keep us alive and we had to move on pretty quickly.

"We had to fix up a few things from the weekend and we've done that through the review and now it's all about Collingwood this weekend."

Geelong has no margin for error tonight.

Even then it might not be enough.

If Adelaide beats West Coast on Sunday at Adelaide Oval, whatever happens tonight is irrelevant in terms of Geelong's finals quest. The

Crows cannot be caught.

But if the Cats win and the Crows lose, the last spot in the top eight rests on the Round 23 clash between the two sides at Simonds next week.

"For us, it's about being brave and it's about winning the ball around the contest," Selwood said.

"They're really good at holding the ball in their front half, as we saw last week, so we need to make sure we have it down our end of the ground."

Despite being pumped by 91 points against Richmond

last week, the Pies still had nine more inside-50s for the game [58-49] but were cut wide open by a Tiger onslaught in the final quarter.

"It's must-win as we do know," said Selwood.

"We've obviously prepared really hard for it, as we do, and as we've got to do."

The Cats also cannot afford another slow start after they were playing catch-up against the Saints last week.

The Saints were four goals clear before the Cats could fire a shot in the opening quarter.

Worsfold warms to Bombers

ROGER VAUGHAN
and STEVE LARKIN

JOHN Worsfold's about-face on a possible return to AFL senior coaching has made him the favourite for the Essendon job.

But Bombers great Tim Watson has urged caution, saying Worsfold must be certain he wants to take such a role on again.

Elsewhere, Adelaide ruck coach Matthew Clarke doesn't expect Worsfold to make a final call on his AFL future until the end of the season.

Like the Bombers, the Crows are also in the market for a senior coach.

As recently as the weekend, the 2006 West Coast premiership mentor said he did not want to return to the role.

Worsfold is helping Adelaide as coaching director following the death of Phil Walsh and will have that assignment until the Crows' season ends.

But he admitted in a TV interview that his view on a return to senior coaching had softened. "There is no doubt that having been back involved and then seeing how great an environment footy clubs are, that there is some thought there that it's a good place to be," he said.

Kangas keen on Carlisle

BEN MCKAY

NORTH Melbourne coach Brad Scott says he'd be interested in Jake Carlisle if the Bombers defender put his hand up to leave the club.

Carlisle, 23, has been widely tipped to move from Essendon after three years of supplements scandal woes, with St Kilda and the Western Bulldogs among a host of interested AFL bidders.

Carlisle is out of contract next year and it was perhaps a sign of the white-hot interest in him that Scott yesterday made a direct pitch.

AFL coaches regularly use very guarded language when discussing players at other clubs, particularly during the season. But asked whether he was interested, Scott said, "He's one of the players we'd like to add," before qualifying his statement.

"Like every club we're looking at all sorts of different options to improve our list.

"If the time comes that Jake decides he'd like to look at a fresh start then that's the time we'll drill down on that."

Carlisle is one of the 34 current and past Essendon players still subject to a WADA appeal on the supplements saga.



FEAR FACTOR: Hawthorn midfielder Liam Shiels says his side cannot afford to take Brisbane lightly at Launceston tomorrow.

Picture: GETTY

Hawks on upset alert against battling Lions

LADDER positions might suggest otherwise, but Hawthorn midfielder Liam Shiels insists Brisbane poses a serious threat in tomorrow's clash at Aurora Stadium.

Entrenched in the top four and fighting for a top-two spot, the Hawks meet a Lions outfit sitting at the bottom of the AFL ladder.

Further in the home side's favour is its imposing record in Launceston — the side is riding a 14-game winning streak with an average winning margin of 62 points.



ADAM SMITH

However Shiels points to last Friday's shock loss to Port Adelaide, which put a severe dent in Hawthorn's aspirations for a home qualifying final, as the perfect indicator that the club can ill afford to take Brisbane lightly.

"Take nothing away from Port Adelaide, but we were

probably a little bit below our best and with the competition the way it is now, no matter where the sides are situated on the ladder, if one team doesn't bring their best performance they are going to get done," Shiels said. "You just have to take each game as it is, you can't look too far ahead."

"Their [Brisbane's] last month in particular has been fantastic, they are playing a more aggressive style of football and getting the ball through the corridor a little bit more.

"We definitely can't underestimate Brisbane. At this time of the year, teams that can't make finals probably start playing a bit more [of an] aggressive style of football."

"We saw that with Port Adelaide, the aggressive manner in which they went about it and their ball movement. Teams that can't make finals tend to try a few different things."

Hawthorn's loss to the Power will almost certainly see it face West Coast on the road in the opening week of the finals, but Shiels said the playing

group hasn't looked at what awaits at the end of the home-and-away campaign despite the media speculation. And with the competition for spots fierce, individuals need to perform on a weekly basis.

"You just have to take each game as it is, you can't look too far ahead," Shiels said.

"I think the great thing about our list at the moment is there is so much depth, so there are so many boys fighting for positions."

"That keeps the senior boys on their toes."