

## Division 1 Hockey 5/4/09

Round 1 of Hockey Albury Wodonga's top grades will be played this Sunday at the Ray White Hockey Centre in Wodonga. With the new grounds at Albury not quite finished all games have been shoehorned onto the Wodonga facility.

With a limited preseason all teams will be needing to come to terms with the new rules, in particular players awarded a free hit can pass the ball to themselves and play on making the game quicker and more exciting.

Last year's division one men's premiership winning coach Tony Jones of Rutherglen thinks it will take some time for the full effect of the rule changes to be seen "my team has lost half its players from last year with the Corowa based lads going back to play for Corowa and Russell Crothers going to work in China. I have promoted three of last years' under sixteen team, Harry Chambers, Riley Oberin and David McIntyre so the first few rounds will be just used to settle our team and to let the new guys get accustomed to the pace and intensity of first grade. I am just looking to be competitive and make the final four this year" said Jones. Jones has had a further setback for the grand final replay against NASC Wombats with his two top goalkeepers away for weddings forcing him to play back in goals which is something he doesn't relish "I have no other choice and its been a while since I played in goals and the ball comes faster and harder than they did when I was at my prime in the net".

Last years women's runner up Norths are the early favourites in their division with the signing of Nan Latta as coach and picking up two handy players in Naree Burkitt, transferred from SS&A Magpies, and Stephanie Medlin from Canberra. Latta is using the first few rounds as a settling in period "it will take us some time to work out our structure and to find a replacement for Leah Donnelly who is having a baby and wont play for a while. I think we will do pretty well and am aiming for a top two finish. Last year we based the team on not having our state league players and we will do the same thing this year, said Latta. Norths take on Beechworth and Latta is confident but wary of her opponents this week "normally we have an indication of were they are up to but the limited preseason has stopped us from getting any feedback".

In the other games Falcons men should be too experienced for last years wooden spooners Wodonga who will be trying out several new players. SS&A Magpies have secured the services of Ricky White who will add a wealth of experience to their young side and this will give them the edge over Norths. Wodonga women will find this year a little tougher than last year when they won the premiership and their first game against SS&A Magpies will be a good indicator of how the season will pan out. These two teams are evenly matched this year so a draw is expected while the final game will be interesting as Rutherglen have entered a first grade team for the first time and they come up against a more experienced Falcons and will find the going tough