

Sharks turn in shocker to end finals tradition

by TERRY WILSON

THE sight of youngster Paul Oldham clumsily botching an attempt at goal from point-blank range typified the end of a grand tradition for Southport in the QAFL competition yesterday.

Like Oldham's left-foot attempt at goal, which resulted in an embarrassing air-swing under no pressure whatsoever from a metre out, the Sharks missed out badly as they crashed to an inglorious defeat at the hands of Kedron-Grange in the preliminary final.

Southport went down 19-10 (124) to 13-13 (91) at the Gabba, thus becoming only the second Sharks' combination to be eliminated from the premierships race before the grand final since the club joined the QAFL in 1983.

In that time, the Sharks have featured in grand finals every year except 1984.

So what went wrong for a club undoubtedly the richest in the competition and which brought together a bevy of high-profile recruits at the start of the year?

Fumbles

Oldham certainly wasn't on his own as far as committing an error. Paul Baker twice made terrible fumbles that resulted in Kedron goals, while youngster Brent Green also missed from point-blank range.

Put simply, the Sharks were not good enough and perhaps the writing was on the wall long before yesterday's effort.

Without injured trio Jason Cotter, Darren Carlson and Steve McLuckie, all prolific possession gatherers, Southport were thrashed at ground level by a side that brimmed desperation and desire to be first to the ball.

Smart tactical work by coach Wayne Johnston also reaped dividends for Kedron-Grange.

"Our idea was to keep the ball in the midfield for as long as we could and not to let it get down to their forwards too quickly," said Johnston.

"If they had got the ball down there fast to blokes like Cameron O'Brien, we'd have been in trouble."

But his Southport rival Mark Browning conceded most of Johnston's match-ups worked well. He wouldn't elaborate, but it was obvious Southport had no answer to the Demons when the ball fell to earth.

And youngster Hamish Simpson, conceding many centimetres to ruck rivals Matt McGuirk and Brent Green, played tremendously well. Johnston said Simpson beat McGuirk and it was hard to disagree.

"They were too good on the day, we have no excuses at all," said a shattered Browning.

"Certainly their match-ups on our stronger players didn't help, but perhaps we carried too many for too long.

"All our better players over the second half of the season didn't have the effect that they were having."

Praise

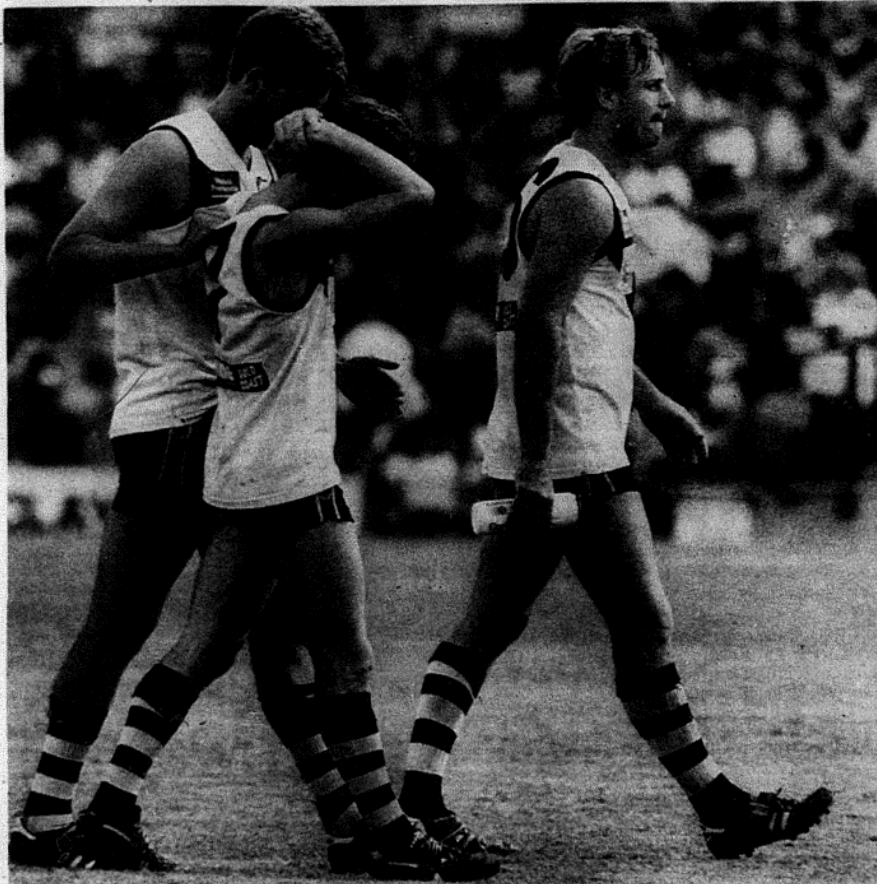
Browning reserved special praise for half-back flanker Craig Mansbridge, clearly best for the Sharks.

"He was magnificent, especially for somebody who, we keep getting told, supposedly doesn't handle finals pressure well," said Browning.

"And I though Craig Headland was good as well. He had a fair effect on the game, especially in the third quarter when he got us back in the game."

Kedron led at every break. The closest Southport came to them was in the third term when they crept to within a goal.

But every challenge was answered by the Demons, who had outstanding performers in flanker Tim Daffy, midfielder Tony Bamford, winger Simon Kenny, Simpson in the ruck and Brisbane player Brendan McCormack, whose bulk worried his opponent Robbie Thompson.



Every picture tells a story ... the realisation that their 1994 season is over hits Southport players (from left) Michael Walsh, Robbie Jones and Craig Headland as they trudge off the Gabba yesterday after their preliminary final loss to Kedron-Grange. Picture: MICHAEL ROSS.

Mark Browning

Browning will seek job again

BEATEN Southport coach Mark Browning is not about to take his ball and go home despite becoming only the second coach to fail to get the Sharks into a QAFL grand final.

After they fell by 33 points to Kedron-Grange in the preliminary final at the Gabba yesterday, this year's Sharks outfit joined their 1984 counterparts as the only combination not to feature in the premierships decider since 1983.

But Browning intends to soldier on and throw his hat into the coaching ring with Southport again next year.

"I want to coach again," was all Browning would say on the subject yesterday.

"But we will have to sit down as a club and work a few things out."

Browning finds himself in the same boat as former Brisbane coach and assistant coach Norm Dare, who was in charge of Southport in 1984 when they ran third.

Dare survived with the Sharks until he switched to the Bears in 1988.