

Victory lifts Leichhardt out of slump and to the top

LEICHHARDT coach Chris Pennington believes his team's 2-0 win against Edge Hill has lifted them from a bout of complacency and a mid-season slump.

Saturday night's win elevated Leichhardt to top spot in the men's premier division after Mareeba's shock 2-0 win over Stratford at their home ground.

Leichhardt and Stratford are now equal on 21 points, but the Lions take spot on the FNQ Football ladder thanks to a superior for-and-against record.

Racking up losses to Marlin Coast

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Rangers and Innisfail in their past two games, Leichhardt fans feared the team's winning passion could be waning.

Pennington said the victory at White Rock had reinstated his team's winning aspirations.

"We came off two losses and it was time to get back on track," he said.

"We talked about players' attitudes and sticking to the plan.

"I changed the pattern of play ...

lifted the intensity of training and basically changed the style of play."

Both teams failed to find the net in the first half, with a number of goal-scoring opportunities squandered by errant shots and poor delivery to strikers.

Two goals in the second half from forwards Tom Murphy and Darcy Fernandez sealed the win for Leichhardt, their seventh for the season after 10 rounds.

Pennington said a stern halftime chat put his men in the right frame of mind to snare a win.

"I didn't get up them, we just had

a very positive halftime chat," he said.

Leichhardt midfielder Horacio Ingles suffered an ankle injury during the game while right back Mark Pinto battled through a niggling calf problem.

Both men will undergo fitness tests tomorrow night to determine their playing chances for this week's game against Stratford.

Edge Hill coach Rob Wales said his strikers were struggling to convert chances.

"We're creating enough chances, we're just not finding the back of

the net," he said. "We've got a fair bank of strikers, we just need to get them to start scoring more."

In the other men's premier game, FNQ Fusion went down to 2-1 to Marlin Coast Rangers at Trinity Beach.

Fusion coach Martin Docherty slammed the umpiring of the match, claiming a second-half send-off cost his team a win.

"It's really disappointing, I don't like to blame the refs but at the end of the day they get paid to do a job and they have to do it responsibly," he said.

Early charge sees Bulls match Strikers' force

THE FNQ exorcised a few troubling demons on their way to a 4-4 draw with Queensland State League nemesis the Brisbane Strikers at Mareeba on Saturday night.

The Bulls were thoroughly outclassed in their two previous meetings with the Strikers this year – a 4-0 loss in Round 6 and an 8-0 thrashing during the pre-season.

Another rout looked likely when the Strikers scored through Michael Angus after six minutes but a pleasingly aggressive Bulls attacked their way into the contest.

The home side levelled through Joe Rusch in the 22nd minute before a first-half double to teammate David Ruiz had the Bulls on course to hand out their own thrashing.

But the Strikers are not a team that capitulates easily and the visitors cut the Bulls' lead to one when Sadler scored in the final minute before halftime.

If the Bulls felt flat heading into the sheds after conceding the late goal they had rediscovered their vigour in time for the restart.

Ruiz completed his hat-trick in the 59th minute and appeared to have sealed one of the Bulls' best

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victories in the club's two-year history.

But the Strikers showed why they are considered one of the league's benchmarks when Sean Burke scored twice in the final half hour to draw scores level before fulltime.

While he would have preferred the win, Bulls coach Peter Tokesi said the result proved to his players they could compete with the Strikers.

"We've got to use this as a springboard. There are not many times in your life where you'll score four goals and get a draw or a loss," he said.

"I thought we battled quite well. "The only thing that worries me is the ease at how we let goals get scored against us.

"Probably we still struggle to defend in the middle of the park and that tends to put pressure on our backline.

"But I can't be too disappointed with the result."

The Bulls' biggest injury worry out of the match was midfielder Bronson Koppen, who was stretchered off with an ankle injury early in the second half.

Contest: Bulls' Nathan Davis moves in on Strikers' Brad McDonald in Saturday night's match.

Picture: JIM HATCHMAN

Hansen riding high in The Netherlands

CAIRNS cyclist Adam Hansen has boosted his Tour de France selection chances with a big win in The Netherlands at the weekend.

The 29-year-old won the third stage of the Star Elektrotoer and also took the overall lead with one stage left.

It was Hansen's first win since taking out the time trial at the 2008 Australian road championships.

Later that year, the HTC-Columbia rider made his Tour de France debut and finished 108th.

He is among more than a dozen Australians who could ride in the July 3-25 Tour.

On Saturday night (Cairns time),

Hansen rode impressively in the hilly 194km stage from Verviers to La Gileppe.

He outsprinted Laurent Beruet of CarmioOro-NGC and Johan Coenen of Topsport Vlaanderen to take the stage win and moved up from 18th overall to the race lead.

"Everybody in the team worked really well to make sure I got in the right move," Hansen said.

"Then there was a final circuit with two laps and the second last time up the climb on it, I formed a group of five guys, trying to get rid of the other general classification riders.

"Finally I attacked at the bottom of

the last ascent, 3km from the finish and that bought me some time.

"I opened up the sprint with about 200m to go, I know my limits well and I started to fade with about 5m left, so I think I got it right."

Hansen has a 15-second lead over Coenen ahead of the 174km flat last stage from Arcen to Helmond.

While HTC-Columbia will try to defend Hansen's lead, they will also look for sprint specialist Andre Greipel to take the stage win.

"We'll be setting things up for Andre in a bunch sprint and try to defend my jersey at the same time – it's a good stage for Andre," Hansen said.



In front: Cairns cyclist Adam Hansen is poised to win a tour in Holland.