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NATIONAL
PREMIER LEAGUES
NSW MEN'S



KICKOFF

GRAND FINAL

**LEICHHARDT OVAL
4PM**

**SUNDAY 9TH
SEPTEMBER 2018**

U18'S • SYDNEY FC V ROCKDALE CITY SUNS FC • 10AM
U20'S • SYDNEY FC V SUTHERLAND SHARKS FC • 12.30PM

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Also, a special thank you to the Football NSW staff assisting in the delivery of today's Grand Final.

It has been an incredible season with so many highlights that have certainly put NSW's top tier Men's competition back on the map.

Here's to a big Grand Final day!





WELCOME

FROM THE CEO



Stuart Hodge
Football NSW CEO

It's an honour as CEO and on behalf of the Board of Directors of Football NSW to welcome you all to Leichhardt Oval for the National Premier League's NSW Men's 2018 Grand Final.

It's been a memorable year for the sport with a number of fantastic achievements and today promises to be a blockbuster affair for all clubs, players, supporters, coaches and volunteers involved in this wonderful sport of ours.

The Grand Final is the culmination of what has been an amazing National Premier Leagues season, with Premiers Sydney Olympic taking on APIA Leichhardt Tigers in the main match at 4pm.

Sydney Olympic coached by Abbas Saad, come into this match with the luxury of a one week break after defeating Sydney United 58 in the Major Semi Final.

It's been a solid season for the Blues who have really shaken up the league this year.

Having taken out the competition by three points, Olympic also won the right to represent NSW at the upcoming NPL Finals Series where

they will take on Perth SC on Sunday 16th of September at Lambert Park.

Their opponents, APIA Leichhardt Tigers, coached by Billy McColl, have come through to the Grand Final the hard way after losing to Sydney United 58 on penalties in the Elimination Final before knocking out Rockdale City Suns 8-2 in the Minor Semi-Final where they really made a statement. It was in the Preliminary Final nerves were put to the test as they won 5-3 on penalties against Sydney United 58 after the game finished 1-1 after extra time. They'll be hungry to continue on with their winning run, but it won't be an easy task against a determined Sydney Olympic outfit.

I want to wish the club good luck also in their fantastic FFA Cup run after defeating last season's Hyundai A-League Champions Melbourne Victory, they will face Adelaide United in the quarter-finals on Wednesday 26th of September at Leichhardt Oval.

I would like to acknowledge the support of our sponsors, TAFE NSW, Ultra Football, PUMA, Powerade, Mitre and Catapult for their valued input and service for our game.

As you can appreciate an event like this would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of a few people and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of Football NSW, the clubs involved and the volunteers who have made today possible with their commitment.

Most importantly, I would like to thank you, the fans for your support, not only during the season but at today's Grand Final.

Our game is for the fans and about the fans and as such we hope you enjoy your day here at Leichhardt Oval and celebrate our great sport.

FOOTBALL NSW WOULD LIKE TO THANK THEIR SPONSORS
FOR THEIR CONTINUED SUPPORT



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CATAPULT

by Nicholas Houghton

Grand Final day is once again on our doorstep with two tribes both desperate for the elation of championship glory.

This year two of the National Premier Leagues NSW competition's most storied clubs will face off in Sydney Olympic and APIA Leichhardt Tigers.

This match pits first and second head to head with APIA desperate to atone for their heartbreaking defeat on the final day of the regular season allowing Olympic to claim the premiership in dramatic fashion.

The Belmore based side won four of their last four games after it appeared they had blown their chances with back to back defeats only month from the finals.

The premiership win was Olympic's first in seven years and today they will be out to replicate the success of the 2011 team by taking out the double with championship success.

Their opponents APIA have plenty of motivation coming into the final game of the 2018 season.

It was only 12 months ago the Tigers suffered a heartbreaking penalty shootout defeat to Manly United in the 2017 NPL NSW grand final.

The pain of that defeat has been a driving force for APIA all year and would've only been compounded by the excruciating way they lost the premiership on the final day of this campaign.

The Lambert Park side unleashed a blistering attack on the league this season, led by Jordan Murray, Tasuku Sekiya and club captain Sean Symons, netting 62 goals to break the record for most goals by any team in a regular season.

Murray was the man doing most of the damage up top as he collected a personal tally of 22 goals to break the individual season scoring record.

However, the success of Murray and APIA proved bittersweet with the young striker's impressive form

catching the attention of the Central Coast Mariners who signed him on the cusp of the finals.

Forced to reshuffle their deck ahead of the biggest matches of their season, The Tigers proved they were more than just a one man show.

Standing in their way is an Olympic side which has finally lived up to the high expectations held by their passionate and vocal fan base.

What's even more impressive is they were without a coach only five days out from the regular season and tipped by many to be heading towards another season of disappointment.

The hiring of Abbas Saad only days out from their first match has proven to be a master stroke with the club great lifting the team to play the best football they have in years.

I wonder if Saad would have envisioned such a meteoric rise when he took over a team struggling for unity.

Obviously he was able to find the secret to helping this team band together as Olympic returned to the top of the pile for the first time in seven seasons.

Both teams come into the final boasting a myriad of match winners but injuries and suspensions could play a major role in hampering each side from playing their strongest possible line-up.

Olympic are led by Spanish star Alex Sanchez who has been an incredible signing for the club this season with 17 regular season goals and a hat trick in their major-semi final win against Sydney United 58.

The former La Liga player is not the only one capable of changing a match though. Max Burgess, Jason Madonis, Radovan Pavicevic, Will Angel and Paul Henderson are names to watch out for and they will all be focused on a lights out performance on this season's biggest stage.

While APIA have lost their star striker,



they are by no means a spent force.

An incredible 3-2 FFA Cup triumph against reigning A-League title holders Melbourne Victory showed they are just as hard to beat without the goal scoring talents of Murray,

This finals series has been somewhat of a renaissance for APIA veteran midfielder Franco Parisi who has gone from super-sub to attacking centre piece.

Throw in the talents of Sekiya, Symons, Themba Muata-Marlow as well as former Perth Glory midfielder Howard Fondyke and it's clear the Tigers' team is not one to be sneezed at.

In my opinion the best thing about this match up is both teams are at their best when they are on the attack.

It is sure to make for a blockbuster clash and hopefully a grand final to remember, no matter who you support.

U18'S - KICK OFF 10AM

MATCH PREVIEW

by Jacob Windon

Rockdale City Suns coach Steve Zoric hopes it will be seventh time lucky when his side meet Sydney FC in the Grand Final this Sunday.

The Suns arrive into the clash at Leichhardt Oval as underdogs having been beaten in their last six fixtures with the NPL NSW Men's 18's Premiers.

But the pieces are slowly coming together for Zoric to plot what would be a massive upset.

"We're going to throw the dice at them. I think that's the only way you can approach it on Grand Final day – anything can happen," said Zoric.

"Sydney FC have been the competition benchmark and my bogey side.

"I've not beaten them yet in two years so we're trying to pull this one off with a sweet one in the Grand Final".

If Rockdale and Zoric can pull it off, it would be a result two years in the making. The Suns were unable to find the back of the net in their three matches against Sydney in 2017, with their campaign eventually culled by the Sky Blues in the semi-finals.

This year has brought improvement beyond sight. And while Sydney FC's entry into the NPL NSW has been the ultimate gauntlet throw-down for some, Zoric says it's forced Rockdale to improve their standards.

"It's a great challenge because you have to improve as a coach. You have to find ways to beat them and you start looking at extra things.

"When they're the most dangerous is on the transition and the counter attack – one little error and they pounce on it. I've never seen a better team at it at this level.

"I'll have to balance the transitional moments and have a few players ready to fill in the spaces while they have the ball and urge them to be very proactive in their defensive position.

While Zoric has spent the first week of September scheming Sydney's downfall, Sydney FC coach Jim van Weeren is eyeing off Sydney's fourth trophy in two years.

The Sky Blues are one step away from back to back doubles, but van Weeren is urging his side not to be complacent.

"A lot of teams that finished in the top five have a lot of quality," he said.

"We were fortunate in some of those games to convert more of our chances than some of them and it's rewarding for the boys that they took chances and put some away."

Van Weeren will also hope this Grand Final goes smoother than the last. Sydney FC did it the hard way in 2017, ultimately prevailing 3-2 over Sydney United 58.

It was a result and performance that underlines Sydney's commitment to attractive attacking football – a philosophy that ensures their matches are always entertaining to watch.

"As a club we believe in scoring more goals than the opponent and that's probably reflected in a lot of our games where sometimes we leave ourselves somewhat vulnerable to opposition counter.

"But we believe in producing goal-scoring players as a club for the first team hopefully one day and beyond and that's definitely translated into the playing style."



U18 'S TEAM LISTS



37 Thomas Main
39 Jaiden Kucharski
41 Mitchell Mattison
56 Scott Browning
78 Alex Masciovecchio
79 Harry McCarthy
81 Callum Talbot
83 Paolo Laxamana

87 Jayden Trenkoski
90 Bailey Togiavalu
91 Adam Pavlesic
94 Fletcher McFarlane
95 Joseph Roddy
98 Jake Hollman
111 Aaron Gurd
112 Antonio Saracino

Coach: Jim Van Weeren
Assistant Coach: Jason Rea
Team Manager: Richard Paddle



4 Tony Mremcevski
6 Christopher Jovanovski
37 Chris Lountzis
46 Jacob Botic
47 Vinko Gacic
50 Joshua Jenicek
51 George Marangos
52 Noah Botic
53 Daniel Gerovski

54 Jackson Angelou
56 Adrian Neoklis
57 Mouhamed Hamdache
58 Mohammed Ahmed
59 Sam Shainfield
60 Jay Hirshowitz
62 Adam Cukar
63 Ellis Bellos
65 Brendon Stefanovski

Coach: Steven Zoric
Assistant Coach: Gary Deprato
Team Manager: Zeljko Bulic



U20'S - KICK OFF 12.30PM

MATCH PREVIEW

by Jacob Windon

Few would have picked Sydney FC as Champions elect after their 6-1 defeat to Sutherland Sharks in the competition's second round.

But the tables have well and truly reversed ahead of Sunday's Grand Final, a fact rammed home by Sydney FC's 5-0 hammering of the Sharks a fortnight ago.

Sydney FC have come a long way according to coach Giancarlo Italiano.

"We got absolutely bullied in that game," he said.

"They really gave us a touch up and it was a real big slap in the face for us."

The response of Italiano's squad has been one of the stories of the season. The Sky Blues have notched an incredible 70 goals this season – 22 more than opponents Sutherland.

What makes their achievement all the more remarkable has been Sydney's defensive record, which is only outranked by bottom pair Sydney Olympic and Rockdale City Suns.

It's an approach that has seen some skewed results and performances across the year, including a 5-5 draw with Bonnyrigg White Eagles. But Italiano says Sydney FC would be foolish to alter their approach on Grand Final day.

"The 20's competition is a very weird mix of teams, we've got a lot of young boys and sometimes you're playing against men.

"If we were to go out and defend against some of these guys we would probably lose these battles over a long period of time. On that fact we promote an attacking style and try to entertain helps the boys move further along.

"The question is, and the test that I'll be giving to all the players is – do we want to win the Grand Final by being a negative team, or by being the team that we've been all year?

"Whether we win or lose, we're going to go out and try to entertain as much as we can and play the best football we can."

Sydney FC's unflinching commitment to attacking football is a story only equalled by Sutherland's quest to reach back to back Championships.

Sutherland are out to repeat what would be a historic triumph, particularly after a season that has seen injuries, suspensions and departures culminate in a horror run of form heading into the finals.

That saw Blacktown City steal Sutherland's Premiership crown,

and the Sharks ability to regroup in the finals has been testament to the side's belief.

"We've had to remain positive and upbeat," says Sharks coach Nick Dimovski.

"I'm proud of the boys to be in this position. We were probably written off by certain pundits at the back end of the year.

"And the 5-0 loss to Sydney FC in the first final was a bitter pill to swallow but we took our medicine and bounced back."

It might have looked unlikely in the final weeks of the regular season but Sutherland are now well poised to clinch consecutive Championship trophies.

Dimovski says belief among the Sutherland squad has been restored and they're daring to dream.

"We're going to focus on our game. We're coming into this game as the defending champions and we want to play that way.

"The boys have been fantastic and they've proven yet again that the most impressive young talent is coming out of the Shire way."



U20'S TEAM LISTS



1	Mitchell Evans (Gk)	24	Daniel Blachura (C)
5	Patrick Scibilio	26	Ben Van Meurs
9	Daniel Maskin	27	Hamish Lamberton
13	Jordan Swibel	28	Paolo Bonanni
17	Marco Tilio	29	Thomas Fay
18	Ben Koop	31	Ryan Teague
19	Giuseppe Tilio	32	Evan Tsakos
22	Harry Van Der Saag	40	David Malishev (Gk)

Coach: Giancarlo Italiano
 Assistant Coach: Shane Smeltz
 Team Manager: Michael Swibel



3	Richard Stewart	25	Blake Currey
6	Lachlan Everett	26	Harry Sutherland
12	Blair Brown	27	Harrison Quirk
16	Ryoga Suyama	31	Gabriel Contigiani
17	Leroy Jennings	32	James Temelkovski
21	Niki Loe	33	Thomas Papa
23	Deren O'Brien	53	Kuot Maliet
24	Adam Massoud		

Coach: Nick Dimovski
 Assistant Coach: Steven Gordon
 Manager: Craig Simmons



U20 PLAYER FEATURE

DANIEL BLACHURA: SKY BLUES STAR READY FOR SHARKS TEST

by Jacob Windon

The lowest point of Sydney FC's season could well prove to be the moment that inspires the team to their maiden NPL NSW Men's 20's Championship, says Daniel Blachura.

After beginning the season with a 6-1 defeat to their Grand Final opponents Sutherland, the Sydney FC skipper is now eyeing off lifting the trophy against the Sharks.

That defeat has sparked a new mentality at the Sky Blues – something that could prove a turning point in many of their Sydney FC careers.

"Being part of the Sydney team, we always have a target on our back, no matter who we play," he said.

"Teams always raise the bar against

us. After that loss to Sutherland we realised that we can't afford to have days off and we have to be performing at our best every game.

"So for us to get to where we are all now has been a great effort from all the boys. We've had a couple of hiccups as well but the effort the boys have put in a lot of effort since round two."

Giancarlo Italiano's side have progressed to the big dance in some style, culminating in a 5-0 victory over Sutherland in the Grand Final qualifier a fortnight ago.

They've easily been the league's entertainers this year, netting in a whopping 70 goals and playing an expansive brand of attacking football.

But this commitment to entertaining has at times been a double-edged sword for the Sky Blues, who have on occasion been punished by their willingness to go forward.

As the team's right fullback, Blachura is one of the most important cogs in linking Sydney's attacking and defensive side of the game, and the high intensity approach has reaped rewards for the player.

"For us we try to play every single minute we can in the opposition's half. We like to push forward and get as many goals as we can and sometimes we get caught out a little bit.

"But we've fixed that up in the second half of the season, we've fixed some faults from the beginning and we've definitely come a long way.

"We're definitely got going to change anything about the way we've been playing or take a step back. We're going to respect that Sutherland have made it to the final, but we're not going to step down- we'll be in their face and giving them a game to remember."



U20 PLAYER FEATURE

by Jacob Windon

DEREN O'BRIEN: SHARKS ACE WANTS GRAND FINAL SILVERWARE

In 2017 Sutherland Sharks won the Premiership and Championship double at a canter.

This year has been a little different for Nick Dimovski's side. The Sharks came out of the early rounds firing but a mid-season slump threw dreams of going back to back in jeopardy.

It has been the ultimate test of character says Sutherland's Deren O'Brien, that the Sharks are now one win away from consecutive Championship triumphs.

"It was a challenge," says O'Brien. The first half of this season we only dropped four or five points but the second half we slipped into a rut.

"We maybe got a bit complacent as I think the whole community that carried us through last year has been lost, especially with so many changes in the squad."

Among key departures the 2017 double-winners have seen this campaign, the losses of striker James Temelkovski and left back Noah Chia have stung hardest.

The duo's exit coincided with a horror run of form for the Sharks, who tailed off badly in the final third of the season – eventually finishing third. Sutherland's regression culminated in a 5-0 hammering to Sydney FC in the semi finals.

"The boys were pretty shattered after that loss," O'Brien remembers.

"In most of our careers I don't think many of us have copped a 5-0 loss. It's very hard to cop that and bounce back from that."

But bounce back they did. The Sharks won their next two knockout fixtures against Sydney United 58 and Blacktown City 2-0 to seal their place in the Grand Final for the second year running.

Although they are reigning Champions, Sutherland perhaps enter this contest as underdogs given the manner of their 5-0 loss to Sydney FC a fortnight ago.

However, O'Brien says the Sharks have learnt their lessons and have the game plan and know-how to clinch the 2018 Championship.

"We need to make sure we get them on the counter. They really like to press you high and they have so much attack up top, but they do leak goals.

"If we can stretch them out and put some diagonals into the channels we could maybe sneak a goal or two. But we have to stay we really structured and that comes all the way down from the frontline to the defence."



FIRST GRADE

MATCH PREVIEW

The biggest game of the National Premier Leagues NSW season has arrived and months of blood sweat and tears will culminate in a blockbuster clash of the titans.

Premiers Sydney Olympic FC will go head to head with APIA Leichhardt Tigers to see who will be crowned champions for the 2018 season.

Olympic and APIA finished the season in first and second place respectively and are fitting combatants for this year's decider.

It has been historic seasons for both clubs with Olympic winning their first premiership in seven years, while APIA return to the decider for the second straight year breaking a number of goal scoring records on the way.

Adding a little extra flavour to the fixture is the fact Olympic pinched the title from APIA's grasp on the final day of the regular season and are now playing for a league double.

This combined with the Tigers' determination to atone for their heartbreaking penalty shootout loss to Manly United in last year's grand final shows that neither side will be struggling to find inspiration for this marquee match-up.

With the pain of that grand final defeat in the back of their mind, APIA raced out of the blocks this season to deliver a year of thrilling attacking football.

No team in the NPL NSW has been as prolific as the Billy McColl coached APIA team with their haul of 62 goals in the regular season setting a new league record.

Olympic on the other hand has been an example of consistency with their impressive form helping them to a run of nine games unbeaten during the first half of the campaign. It was the longest streak of its type by any team this season.

Their 4-0 drubbing of Sydney United 58 in the major semi-final was a warning that they won't be stopped on their endeavour to take home the premiership and championship double.

On the park, both teams have squads bristling with talent.

Olympic have the best defence in the competition conceding only 19 goals. Their attack was also not to be laughed at either as they netted 40 goals - the second best tally in the league.

Spanish striker Alex Sanchez has been a revelation for the Abbas Saad coached Olympic scoring 17 goals in the regular season and followed it up with a hat-trick in his one finals match.

Central defender Tom Whiteside has become a solid force in the heart of the Belmore based side's back line and has only improved since the





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departure of established stopper George Timotheou mid-way through the campaign.

While Olympic is prominently a team of young talent, established veterans Will Angel and Paul Henderson provide the team with experience and composure.

The fact APIA have made it through to the grand final is proof of the fluidity and flexibility of their squad.

The mid-year transfer window featured the departure of a number of players from Lambert Park, including Olympic midfielder Zach Mackenzie, while star striker Jordan Murray was snapped up by Central Coast Mariners after his haul of 22 goals broke the regular season scoring record.

It has meant plenty of shuffling the deck for McColl and the way his players have been able to step up into different roles in the team as well as playing more minutes than

usual has been a big part of their success.

APIA club legend Franco Parisi has been one of the biggest examples of this with the midfield maestro experiencing somewhat of a renaissance during the past two months as he has taken on a more central role in the Tigers attack.

Defensively APIA has struggled to keep their opposition scoreless, but on their day are tough to break down.

Themba Muata-Marlow is a monster in the heart of APIA's back line with his athleticism and eye for the game making him a nightmare for strikers.

This game presents a number of key match-ups with some of the competition's most talented players going head to head.

Can Olympic's rock hard defence be able to stop APIA's record setting attack?

Will Alex Sanchez be too much for

APIA's back line to handle?

Will the scars from last year's grand final penalty shoot-out loss and this year's final day premiership capitulation weigh too heavily on APIA?

Does Olympic have the fortitude to beat APIA on the biggest stage?

The two sides have faced off three times this season in all competition's with APIA winning two and one match ending in a draw.

While Olympic will have the mental edge as premiers, APIA's good results against their grand final opponents and recent comeback wins could give them a slight advantage.

Whatever the outcome this afternoon will be, goals, excitement and entertainment are sure to be on the menu.

However, when it's all said and done, only one team can be crowned champions.



FIRST GRADE TEAM LISTS



1 PAUL HENDERSON
2 TOM WHITESIDE
3 JAKE DE MARIGNY
5 JAMES DEMETRIOU
6 NICOLA KULESKI
7 WILLIAM ANGEL
8 JASON MADONIS (C)
9 RADOVAN PAVICEVIC
10 MAX BURGESS
11 JINYA AN
12 ZAC MACKENZIE

14 ALEJANDRO SANCHEZ
18 BRENDAN HOOPER
19 DARCY BURGESS
20 EZEQUIEL CONSONI
21 STEPHEN ATHANASERIS
23 RILEY WOODCOCK
24 CHRISTOPHER GLIGOR
26 BILLY PATRAMANIS
30 LACHLAN WATSON
33 NIKOLAS TSATTALIOS
99 PAUL KATSETIS

COACH: ABBAS SAAD ASSISTANT COACH: KERIM BABA
CONDITIONING COACH: NAVID ABDI GOALKEEPER COACH: STACEY ALOGDELLIS
MANAGER: PARRY HATZI



1 IVAN NECEVSKI
2 NATHAN MILLGATE
3 PAUL GALIMI
4 JOSH SYMONS
5 STEPHAN ADATTINI
7 HOWARD FONDYKE
8 COREY BICZO
10 FRANCO PARISI

12 BENJAMIN MCCARRON
13 DAVID D'APUZZO
15 THEMBA MUATA-MARLOW
16 SEAN SYMONS (C)
17 SAM GULISANO
18 ADRIAN UCCHINO
20 TASUKU SEKIYA
22 BLAKE TUXFORD

COACH: BILLY MCCOLL
ASSISTANT COACH: JOHN CALLEJA, BRONISLAV JASICZEK VON CASTELLO
TEAM MANAGER: SERGIO BUCCIARELLI, SAM BARLETTA, JOE CALABRO

REFEREES: KURT AMS, LANCE GREENSHIELDS, KEARNEY ROBINSON
4TH OFFICIAL: CRAIG FISHER
ASSESSOR: ALEX GLASGOW



KEY PLAYERS

SYDNEY OLYMPIC FC



ALEJANDRO SANCHEZ



It's not too often a player with experience playing in Spain's premier competition La Liga decides to ply their trade in the NPL NSW Men's competition, but boy aren't we happy Sydney Olympic's Alejandro Sanchez Lopez made that move this season.

The striker has proven to be a class above this campaign for Olympic scoring 17 goals in the regular season to catapult the Abbas Saad coached side to Premiership glory.

Sanchez is dangerous with and without the ball. The Spaniard is always looking to get in behind the defence or in space around the penalty area and drives at defenders when in possession.

The 29-year-old is always a handful and is certain to play a major role for his side if they are to achieve Championship glory this season.

He is the heartbeat of the Blues squad who rely heavily on the Spaniard, a player to look out for today.

PAUL HENDERSON



One of the competition's elder statesmen, Olympic keeper Paul Henderson's experience and ability to perform in big games is second to none.

The former Leicester City keeper has been a mountain at the back for Olympic for more than seven seasons. Henderson has claimed seven clean sheets so far this season including three from his past three games.

The in-form shot stopper is a rock at the back for Sydney Olympic and will be hard to beat on Grand Final day.

MAX BURGESS



Midfield dynamo Max Burgess has returned from Portugal with a vengeance this season to become one of the most damaging players in his position in the league.

A season in Portugal has helped Burgess mature his game and it has shown with an incredible return of seven goals and even more assists this campaign.

Burgess' ability to link up with Spanish striker Alejandro Sanchez will have a big say in the number of opportunities on goal Olympic can create in the decider.

An energetic midfielder with plenty of panache, Burgess could be the game breaker to elevate Sydney Olympic to a historic double piece of silverware.

WILL ANGEL



It's been a season to never forget for Sydney Olympic club legend Will Angel.

The veteran right back has once again been an influential figure at the club during their Premiership winning campaign in which he also notched his 200 game for the club.

Angel is a double threat for Olympic offering an attacking outlet out wide as well as lock down defence on his flank.

His experience and game knowledge is vital in big games and he will be ready to put in the performance of a lifetime to ensure his beloved Olympic taste grand final glory.



KEY PLAYERS

APIA LEICHHARDT TIGERS FC

IVAN NECEVSKI



Veteran shot stopper Ivan Necevski has had another strong season in between the sticks for APIA.

With a career spanning 17 years and 10 seasons in the A-League, Necevski's experience and composure in big matches will be priceless for APIA on grand final day.

Necevski's penalty shootout save to deny Shannon Cole in the preliminary final was a crucial moment of The Tigers' campaign and he could be set for further game changing moments against Olympic.

TASUKU SEKIYA



APIA Leichhardt Tiger's Japanese import Tasuku Sekiya has taken his game to another level in 2018.

Whether it was his FFA Cup heroics against Melbourne Victory, the classy chip against Rockdale City Suns or his reinvention as a target man, Sekiya has proven he is no one trick pony.

A technical player who has added a new found physicality to his game, Sekiya is sure to be a big part of any APIA victory.

He has also been regarded as one of the best Asian imports to grace NPL pitches.

SEAN SYMONS



Tigers' captain Sean Symons may not have found the back of the net as much this season, but his importance to APIA has never been greater.

The marauding winger is a regular attacking threat for the Lambert Park based side with Symons capable of creating chances as well as just putting the ball in the back of the net.

Nothing would mean more to Symons than leading this group to Grand Final success so expect a marathon performance from the young midfielder.

NATHAN MILLGATE



APIA Leichhardt Tigers defender Nathan Millgate has become an integral part of the side's success and will be a player to watch on grand final day.

The towering wing back is a potent scoring threat from set pieces as was proven when he leaped above the Melbourne Victory defence to head home the winner in APIA's historic FFA Cup triumph.

Millgate's impressive fitness allows him to be both a solid body in defence as well as a wide attacking threat and he will likely be a big part of APIA's game plan against Olympic.

PLAYER COMMENTS

SYDNEY OLYMPIC FC



JASON MADONIS



On why Sydney Olympic can be champions

I think we have proven that we are the team to beat in this competition. The table doesn't lie and we come into the grand final as premiers because we were the most consistent team all season.

We have the belief that we can do the double and add the championship to our trophy cabinet for this season.

We are strong across the park in all positions and I think we have what it takes to win no matter who we play.

On coach Abbas Saad

Abbas has been a brilliant coach for us this season.

I think any club that had a change of coach only five days out from the start of the season would usually struggle. However, Abbas came in with strong views on how he wanted to play and it was a match made in heaven.

We took to his style and his game plan from the outset and he has become a strong and very positive influence at the club.

On what winning the grand final means for the club

To win the grand final and claim a premiership and championship double would be a historic moment for the club.

The last time Olympic had achieved something like this was 2011 so to reach those huge heights once again would be a brilliant moment for everyone involved at the club.

It has taken seven years for Olympic to return to this level of challenging for every trophy on offer so a win on grand final day would be a massive.

TOM WHITESIDE



On Olympic's impressive recent form

Everyone knew we needed to turn it on for the last part of the season.

After the losses to Blacktown City and Rockdale City Suns, we realised that we needed to lift especially with the finals just around the corner.

We've just put our heads down and given everything at training and in matches which has thankfully helped us to a number of wins.

On grand final nerves

I wouldn't say there are many nerves, it is more we are just anxious to get out on the pitch and play this game.

Everyone is really eager to get in there, eager to win this match and hopefully bring home the double.

Personally I'm just so focused on the game and my preparation that I haven't had a chance to experience any pre-game nerves.

On whether the week off will impact their performance

I don't think the extra week off will impact us too much. We might be a tiny bit fresher but at this point of the season I doubt it really makes that much of a difference.

Everyone is going to be up for this game so no matter if you're fresh or not, every player will be leaving everything out on the pitch for their team.

Adrenalin takes over in big matches and often fatigue and niggles just go out the window for those crunch moments.



PLAYER COMMENTS

APIA LEICHHARDT TIGERS FC

SEAN SYMONS



On captaining your team to the grand final

Its an incredible honour and something which I don't think I could ever take for granted being able to captain my side to a big spectacle such as this.

When I was given the captaincy at the start of the season it was such an incredible feeling and a responsibility I was proud to undertake.

This is such a great group of boys and I know everyone is willing to put everything on the line to help us take home grand final glory.

On what is different from last years team

I think the biggest difference to last season's team is our mentality.

Losing that match to Manly United in a penalty shootout this time last year was quite heartbreaking and everyone went away from that determined to make sure it never happened again.

We are so focused on the goal at hand and this time around we won't be overawed by playing in a grand final.

We really want to win this not only for ourselves, but for the club, our supporters and our close ones who have followed us for quite some time now.

The players cannot wait for the match as taking part and playing in a Grand Final is something we all put in our list of objectives when the season kick's off and it's all come down to this match against Sydney Olympic.

THEMBA MUATA-MARLOW



On returning to the grand final for the second straight year

Making it back to the decider means a lot to everyone in the team.

It has been a little bit harder for us throughout the season with so many players leaving but we showed true grit and determination against Sydney United 58 last weekend to earn our spot today.

We have a great bunch of lads and I think we deserve what we have achieved so far in 2018.

On seeking revenge for last year's grand final loss

We really wanted to make amends for losing to Manly United last season.

Losing in a grand final is tough enough as it is, but to go down in penalties against a side you had beaten a few times before that makes it worse.

This time around we can't allow the same result to happen again.

On grand final opponents Sydney Olympic

They are a great team and have been quality all season.

We were playing catch-up with each other all season and they managed to take advantage of our loss on the final day to pinch the premiership from our grasp.

We can't let them take home the double this season.

TALE OF THE TAPE

2018 ENCOUNTERS

ROUND 2

APIA LEICHHARDT TIGERS 2 - SYDNEY OLYMPIC 0 SUNDAY, MARCH 18 AT LAMBERT PARK

APIA Leichhardt continued its flawless start to the season with a 2-0 win against Sydney Olympic at Lambert Park.

The Tigers had their chances early in the match but it took a 39th minuted penalty from George Howard for the home side to break the deadlock.

Both goalkeepers had plenty of work to do in the second stanza with both APIA's Ivan Necevski and Olympic's Paul Henderson making clutch saves to keep their team in the contest.

However, APIA would have the final laugh as Sean Symons doubled the home side's lead in the 72nd minute with a headed finish from a sublime Jordan Murray cross.

The win was APIA's first home win of the season while for Sydney Olympic the result was a reality check after their opening week win and would go on to be only one of two losses they would suffer over the first 11 weeks of the competition.

ROUND 7 FFA CUP PRELIMINARY ROUND SYDNEY OLYMPIC 0 - APIA LEICHHARDT TIGERS 3

**WEDNESDAY, MAY 30 AT BELMORE
SPORTS GROUND**

Belmore Sports Ground played host to a mammoth NPL top of the table clash as APIA Leichhardt Tigers came home with the coveted spot disposing of league leaders Sydney Olympic 3-0 to qualify for its second successive Round of 32 qualifier.

It didn't take long for the NPL NSW Men's leading goalscorer Jordan Murray to put his mark on the game as he opened the scoring in the 13th minute.

The Blues were left stunned and coach Abbas Saad did all that he could to push his chargers for that elusive equaliser only to see his side slip further behind as Japanese import Tasuku Sekiya joined in on the act in the 73rd minute.

The game was all but over right on the ninety-minute mark when Corey Biczo rubbed salt into the wounds of the Blues as Billy McColls' men celebrated a memorable victory.

ROUND 13

SYDNEY OLYMPIC 1 - APIA LEICHHARDT TIGERS 1 SUNDAY, JUNE 3 AT BELMORE SPORTS GROUND

A last gasp Jordan Murray header helped a 10-man APIA Leichhardt Tigers snatch a 1-1 draw against Sydney Olympic at Belmore Sportsground.

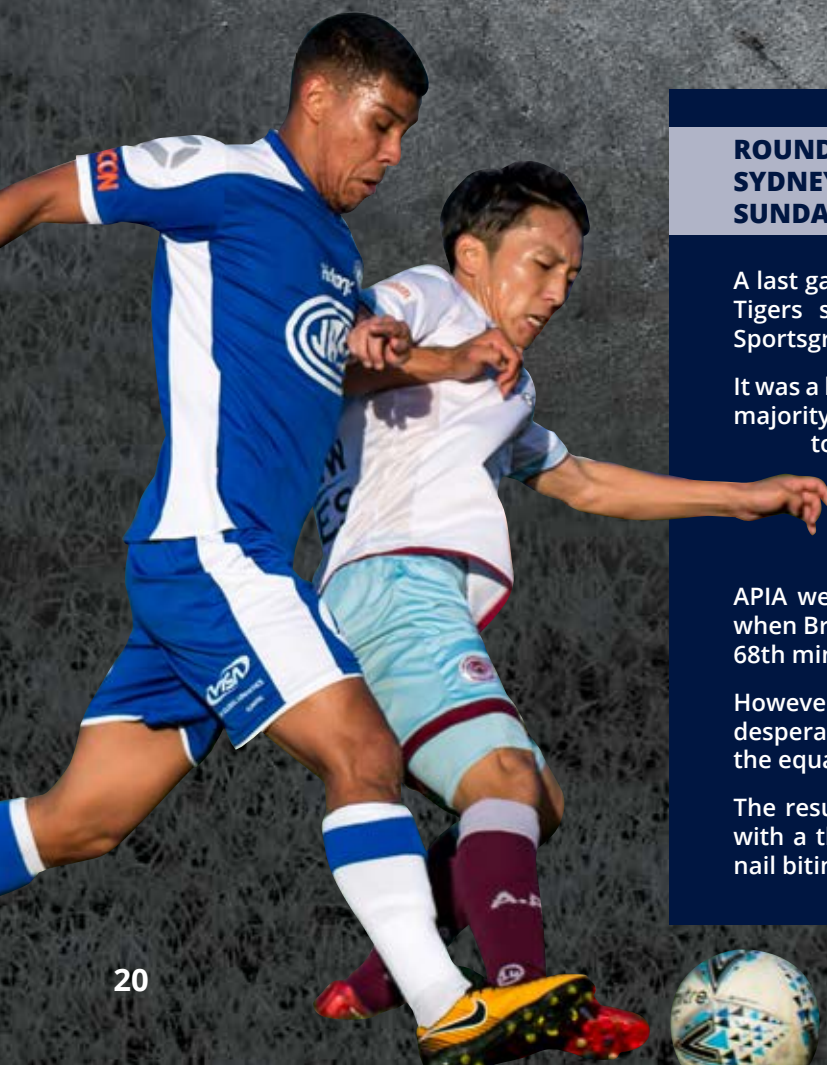
It was a heartbreaking result for Sydney Olympic who dominated the majority of the match and should have taken a six point lead at the top of the National Premier Leagues NSW competition ladder.

Jinya An gave the home side the lead in the 35th minute with a cool finish from inside the penalty area after a scrap for possession from a looping corner kick.

APIA were determined to fight back but were reduced to 10-men when Brandon Lundy was shown a second yellow and sent off in the 68th minute.

However, the visitors would find the equaliser they were ever so desperate for as Murray jumped above two markers to nod home the equaliser and his 12th goal of the season.

The result meant Olympic remained at the top of the competition with a three point lead over the second placed Tigers setting up a nail biting premiership race.



ABBAS SAAD



On taking over as coach days out from the start of the season

If you told me on my first day that I would lead the team to the premiership and would contest a grand final I would've thought you were crazy.

My first thoughts were to just to get to know the players and make the squad as unified as possible.

It took me six weeks to really get the run of things but if it wasn't for the players, we wouldn't have achieved what we have.

On the secret to Olympic's success

One of the main messages I have preached this season is togetherness and being a close knit group which worked for each other on and off the pitch.

I think it has been an important part of our success and it has developed a great atmosphere among the team.

For me, having an honest and respectful environment where everyone can trust each other was imperative and thankfully everyone responded really well and embraced that philosophy.

On what winning the double would mean for Sydney Olympic

Sydney Olympic is a big club and winning goes hand in hand with that.

There has been seven seasons since we last won a title and it is important we return to that level where every year we are in contention.

It means everything to the players, the owners and the fans that this club does well so hopefully we can achieve that success.

BILLY MCCOLL



On handling the pressure of a grand final

We have been there before and understand what playing in big matches is like.

In my mind there is no pressure on the boys. We are where we set out to be and will be completely prepared for everything that comes our way.

There has been a lot of work on mentality and how to handle pressure this season so it's not a concern for me at all.

On APIA's grand final preparations

The preparations for this match haven't been ideal for us because of the heavy workload we have had in the weeks leading up to the game.

Injuries are really taking a toll and it has meant this week has been a very light training week as we try to get everyone in the best possible shape for the grand final.

There are some players who have been in serious doubt to play and I have had to keep a few possible options open.

At this point of the year everyone in the team know what they need to do so we won't be adding anything new into our game plan.

Why the scars of last year's defeat won't hold APIA back

We have gone the whole year working towards a set goal and I think the team is fully prepared to handle whatever comes their way on Sunday.

This season we have become much stronger mentally so I don't think any mental scars will be a concern for this team.

It has been a different approach overall this campaign and at the end of the day I think we have what it takes to get the win.

PLAYER FEATURE

SANCHEZ TAKING NPL NSW MEN'S LEAGUE BY STORM

by Nicholas Houghton

When Sydney Olympic star Alejandro Sanchez swapped the top tiers of Spanish football for the National Premier Leagues NSW competition, little did he know the season ahead would be the most satisfying of his career.

Sanchez's journey to the NPL NSW is quite unique and includes experience playing against the world's best players in the La Liga, including Juan Mata, David Silva and David Villa.

A rising star in the academy of boyhood club Real Zaragoza, the 29-year-old would go on to play for the club's first team before building a career across club's in both the Spanish first and second divisions.

What's even more incredible is that he was born without a right hand and has never allowed this limitation to hold him back.

While Sanchez admits he could've easily stayed playing in Spain for the rest of his career, the desire to see

the world and play football in another country drove him to make the life changing decision which brought him to Sydney Olympic.

"Former Olympic coach Gorka Etxeberria got in contact with me last year and said he was very interested in bringing me out to Australia to play," Sanchez said.

"I had no idea about the league or Sydney Olympic but I had a feeling that I needed a change and for that reason alone the opportunity wasn't one I could pass up.

"I feel more satisfied with the past season than even my time playing in La Liga.

"Moving to Australia was always going to be a big risk but I feel it has paid off both on and off the pitch. I'm just loving my time here.

"I feel at home in Sydney and it has made everything just so easy."

Arriving in Australia at the end of 2017

to commence preseason training with his new club, Sanchez's time with Olympic nearly had a sudden and premature end when Etxeberria was sacked only a week out from the start of the regular season.

The Spaniard admitted he was sizing up other options including a return home after learning of Etxeberria's departure, but was convinced to stay the course after meeting incoming Olympic coach Abbas Saad.

What appeared to be a recipe for disaster proved to be a masterstroke for Sydney Olympic with Saad helping his star striker fire on all cylinders and score 17 goals in 22 matches.

"In terms of my football I think I have been able to play to my strengths and I feel my goal tally shows what I am capable of," he said.

"Abbas is a great coach and because he was a player himself he understands the best way to get the most out of his squad.

"Before Abbas arrived, the team was struggling and I was really worried if we would even win a game.

"However, since he has take over the team, we have really come together and gone from strength to strength.

With a grand final on the horizon, Sanchez sent a reminder to his rivals ahead of the competition decider with a hat trick in Olympic's 4-0 major semi-final win against Sydney United 58.

While admitting he is still coming to grips with the concept of finals football, Sanchez said he won't stop until Olympic takes home the trophy on grand final day.

"The team and the coach explained to me that it is like playing in a cup final because of course in Spain, the season is decided by the team who finishes on top at the end of the season," he said.

"For me it is strange to think we could have potentially missed out on the biggest game of the season despite finishing in first place.

"I'm excited to play in this game and my confidence is high after scoring three goals against United 58.

"No matter who we come up against I know we have the quality to win."



by Nicholas Houghton

'AGE AIN'T NOTHING BUT A NUMBER' FOR CLUB LEGEND FRANCO PARISI

APIA Leichhardt Tigers are more than just a football club for their midfield maestro Franco Parisi. It's a home.

The club legend has been playing the game he loves at Lambert Park for more than 20 years and has experienced both the good and bad they have gone through in that time.

Since joining APIA in 1994 as a junior, Parisi has forged a connection with the club which goes beyond the playing field.

"Football for me would not be possible anywhere else. It has been amazing to experience and have such close ties to this club," Parisi said.

"It is definitely a home and a place that has become a huge part of my life.

"There is something special about this club. There is an incredible spirit about the place which I noticed years ago and it has stuck with me ever since.

"If I weren't at APIA I wouldn't be playing at all. This club is the reason I have kept going because I just love being a part of it."

APIA return to the National Premier Leagues grand final for the second straight year after suffering a heartbreaking penalty shoot defeat to Manly United in 2017.

With a chance to atone for last year's defeat, Parisi said securing grand final glory with APIA would be something he could never forget.

"Winning the premiership last year was a dream come true. I was so happy to give this club and its fans the success it deserves," he said.

"Overall, any success I have with APIA automatically goes to the top for me because these wins just mean so much more.

"The FFA Cup win against Melbourne Victory was unforgettable. To hear so many people singing the APIA song from the stands gave me chills. It was such an incredible moment.

"Hopefully we can recreate that in

the grand final against my former club Olympic."

However it hasn't always been bright times and title contention for APIA.

The club has come along way from the 2010 and 2012 seasons when they were battling relegation.

Nevertheless, Parisi said those seasons are remembered just as fondly as the seasons where APIA has won.

"From a personal point of view, each season and each moment I have had with this club has meant something unique," he said.

"The seasons we were fighting relegation was just as important for me as these days when we are contending for the title and other honours.

"The work we did and lessons we learnt from those difficult times were the platform for us to build towards reaping the rewards we have received in recent seasons."

Despite being the oldest member of the APIA playing group, Parisi has taken on a more prominent role this season as the focal point of the side's midfield.

He said he has enjoyed the opportunity to play more minutes on

the park and was determined to help his team triumph against Sydney Olympic.

"The current playing group is the most close knit team I have been apart of. The unity of these boys is just incredible," he said.

"They are a special group and nobody wants to let their teammates down.

"It's a great atmosphere to have around the squad. Everyone is so driven to achieve success as a team instead of individual honours."

Parisi admitted he has considered retirement before each of the past few seasons but his passion for the club kept bringing him back.

"For me football has always been about the love of the game before anything else," Parisi said.

"If I'm not completely passionate about something and willing to commit to it then I don't think it's worth doing.

"Undoubtedly my love for this club and the people keeps bringing me back.

"This club and the people involved deserve success. Hopefully we can deliver that on Sunday."





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ROBBIE SLATER MEDAL

The 'Robbie Slater Man of the Match' award was instigated to honour the tough tackling attacking midfielder as he spent his early years developing as a footballer in NSW before trekking off overseas to forge a successful footballing career abroad.

"I've got a huge history in NSW, especially as a footballer" says Slater.

"I grew up in the Bankstown area and commenced my career as a footballer with the Revesby Rovers and Revesby Workers before moving to Panania RSL then onto Auburn.

"Soon after that I played almost 100 matches for the St George Saints then went to the Blacktown City Demons and Sydney United in the old National Soccer League before I left for Belgium.

"You could certainly say that I

spent my early life developing as a footballer in NSW, so to receive such an accolade was a huge honour indeed."

Born in Lancashire, England, the 46-year-old was delighted to have been given this honour by Football NSW as Slater holds a high regard for the National Premier Leagues NSW Men's competition.

"As I said earlier it's a huge honour and quite humbling really to have been thought of for this.

"I have been involved with this since 2009 and have seen all the winners move onto bigger things which have seen various players take part in the Hyundai A-League and more.

"In my opinion the NPL NSW Men's competition has developed a number of current Hyundai A-League stars who have gone onto play higher

whether it be abroad or for the Socceroos.

"The competition itself has evolved in many ways and that's also thanks to the FFA Cup.

"A number of the clubs taking part in the NPL NSW Men's competition were involved in the old

National Soccer League but I really believe that these clubs have played a huge role in way the Australian game has progressed.

"In my opinion the NPL NSW Men's has been seen as a pathway to the top for our many elite footballers at the present moment and is certainly an important competition in Australia."

The 'Robbie Slater Man of the Match' is presented at the conclusion of the NPL NSW Men's Grand Final.

PAST ROBBIE SLATER
MAN OF THE MATCH
WINNERS

2009 Blake Powell
Sutherland Sharks

2010 Tolgay Ozbey
Blacktown City FC

2011 Peter Triantis
Sydney Olympic

2012 Nathan Elasi
Marconi Stallions

2013 Alex Mansueto
Bonnyrigg White Eagles

2014 Kearyn Baccus
Blacktown City

2015 Chris Tadrosse
Bonnyrigg White Eagles

2016 Danny Choi
Blacktown City

2017 Dylan Mitchell
Manly United



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