

that we share. I have been playing at this club for three seasons now, and I feel that the players friendship both on and off the field has been even stronger than ever before – we all play for one another and I think this has played a big role for our team this season.

“We will play on Sunday for each other, for our supporters, and of course Michael West and Osagie Ederaro who have been out – these boys played a big part in helping the team reach this stage of the season.

“Against Sutherland Sharks, we believe we can win. We did play them two weeks ago and won on their home surface, so we know that we are capable of beating them, even though it will be a difficult match. Like any Finals match, the team who makes the mistakes on the day will be punished, and I believe our team has proven that we are capable of handling pressure.”

**Nick Stavroulakis (Sutherland Sharks):**

“It is a fantastic feeling for all the team to have sealed a spot in the Grand Final. This is for all the hard work that we have put in from the start of the season. Against Sydney Olympic we haven’t had much success in the two knock-out matches this season, perhaps we deserved something more on those occasions (Johnny Warren Cup Final and Tiger Turf Cup semi-final), but to come out on top and get into the Grand Final is something special.

“On a personal level it has been a great season following the surgery I had in pre-season (knee). It took me a little

while to get going though I am really happy with where I have gotten myself to today. The goal against Sydney Olympic? It was a special goal against one of the form teams this season. I just wanted to pressure David Reid’s cross from the left and it paid dividends for us.

“For the Grand Final, we want much of the same. The same intensity and application from each of the boys. If we manage that, we will be giving ourselves every chance of a win.”

**Jim Bakis (Sutherland Sharks):**

“Prior to the Johnny Warren Cup our team was written off. With our run in the Cup and then our great perform-

ances this season we have proven a lot of people very wrong. It has been great, though we really want to make it special by winning the Grand Final on Sunday.

“Against Sydney Olympic we all fought as hard as we could. We knew Sydney Olympic were going to attack us as we were ahead and they needed to score to stay alive. Each of the boys put in 100% effort, and together we held off. “I felt my legs starting to give away towards the end after such a hectic pace, though in the end the feeling of the win is great – but, we need to focus this week in the build-up to the Grand Final and ensure we show up on the day and perform”.



**Key player match-ups**

**Wollongong FC**

**Ilija Prenzoski** - Ilija Prenzoski has been the bright shining light in the attacking third for Wollongong FC this season. With the likes of Osagie Ederaro out injured and Dez Giraldo joining Sydney FC in the A-League, Prenzoski has taken the weight of expectation on his shoulders and he has not disappointed. Prenzoski has shown his experience and produced important performances en-route to the Grand Final. A Wolves win will require a top performance by their main marksman on Grand Final day.

**Ballamadou Conde** – A creative genius out of midfield, Conde’s experience and finesse has provided Wolves’ supporters with attractive football throughout the season. With a steady rear-guard behind him, Conde’s ability to instantly spring his strikers into the attacking third is second to none, and will be an avenue for attack that coach John Turner will be eager to exploit.

**Ben Blake** – Captain courageous, Blake’s presence at the back guarantees consistency for the Wolves. Paired alongside another in-form talent, Danial Cummins, the Wolves central defensive pairing offers a pillar of strength to this well-balanced team.

**Alfredo Esteves** – Alfredo Esteves’ grasp of the holding role in midfield has been immense for Wollongong’s successes this season. A calm and confident player on the ball, Esteves’ ability to thwart opposition counter-attacks has proved telling in the Wolves run to the Finals series.

**Justin Pasfield** – One of Australia’s up-and-coming goalkeepers, Justin Pasfield has already proven his worth with some exceptional performances for the Wolves. Already with a mountain of experience after working alongside Clint Bolton and Jim Fraser at Sydney FC, Pasfield offers the Wolves consistency between the ‘sticks’.

**Sutherland Sharks**

**Brendan Gan** – A star for the future, Brendan Gan’s performances this season have been instrumental for

Sutherland. A player with exceptional foot-work and speed, Gan has been a creative genius for his side. Equipped with a lethal right-boot, the Sharks’ midfielder has ‘pitched in’ with some important goals this season.

**Brad Boardman** – Sutherland Sharks’ front-man Brad Boardman scored 19-times in regular season action, a mighty return for his side. Boardman’s height and strength offers the Sharks the possibility to hold up play and wait for the wide men to move forward, along with an impressive ability to win aerial challenges inside the penalty-area, goals will be a certainty if the wide-men feed their marksman.

**Nick Stavroulakis** – Another creative element in coach Brian Brown’s midfield, Nick Stavroulakis has grown from strength-to-strength this season. Forced to miss the early part of the season following knee surgery, Stavroulakis has fought for his spot in a competitive midfield and has become a mainstay in the latter part of the campaign. A fine ball winner, who also offers weight in attack, Stavroulakis will play an important role on Sunday.

**George Souris** – As is the case with all football teams all over the world, the player who wears the armband carries the emotion and flair of his side, and George Souris’ presence has been immense this season. The central defender returned for the Sharks’ Preliminary Final win against Sydney Olympic following a nasty ankle injury, and he proved his worth as he lead a Sharks ‘resistance’ in defence. A Sharks line-up without their captain is a Sharks’ line-up that plays a man down.

**Phillip Zabaks** – Another exceptional talent in the goal-keeping ranks, Phillip Zabaks has played an impressive role for the Sharks this season. A string of saves from point-blank range against Sydney Olympic in the Preliminary Final ensured the Sharks a spot in the Grand Final. Zabaks offers Brian Brown an additional sense of security in the defensive third; the shot-stopper also possesses good feet and does leave his line to play the sweeper’s role if needed.

**Coaches Comments**

**John Turner (Wollongong FC):**

“It has been a great season to-date and I am proud of each player that is part of this team; the boys have been wonderful to work alongside and it is a privilege for myself to reach the Grand Final with this group.

“We have had the week off and have been able to have all our players go through recovery following the recent match against Sutherland where we did have a number of injury concerns. I am happy to say that we pretty much have everyone on-board for Sunday’s match.

“The side has made a bit of a habit of coming from behind and the players are really making life difficult for myself when they do this... it would be nice to hit the lead for once as I believe we will be very difficult to breakdown should we take the lead.

“I’ve been happy with the group as a whole, and upfront Ilija Prenzoski has been brilliant for us with his goals; his experience has really been a bright light for the younger players also.”

A special mention for Michael West who suffered a horrible spleen injury:

“The team will also hope to collect a win for Michael West who has been ruled out of football for at least another six-months.

“He is a great lad and we will be hoping to have him on the field with us to collect a medal – hopefully the winner’s medal.”

**Brian Brown (Sutherland Sharks):**

“I am extremely proud of the boys and their efforts in recent weeks – especially with the win against Sydney Olympic last weekend.

“At 2-0 we had a chance to make it three via Boardman (Brad Boardman) and the match would have certainly been all over at that point.

“Sydney Olympic pressed us and got one back, though our guys fought really hard to secure the win – even though they made it very difficult for us on the bench as we really suffered.

“Against Wollongong FC we’ll be ready to fight for the title. It has been a great season for us and the slight slump we had coincided with a number of injuries and suspensions.

“We still have a couple of players carrying injuries though we believe in our abilities.

“Wollongong FC have proven that they are an exceptional side – they beat us at home to qualify first for the Grand Final, even though we did have an afternoon where we created many chances and just failed to capitalise.

“It is a Grand Final, a one-off match, where anything can happen, though I am optimistic that my players can cap off a brilliant season on Sunday.”