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Sports World

With LAKIS KONISTIS

HYUNDAI A-LEAGUE ONE WEEK AWAY

The Hyundai A-League 2009/10 season is a week away and all ten clubs are in the final stages of their preparations for the opening round. Without a formal Pre-Season Cup competition this year, the Hyundai A-League clubs have been very creative with their choice of opposition for friendly matches ranging from the local state league through to English Premier League teams. All clubs have used the pre-season to trial players, formations and tactics with their early form pointing to an extremely exciting Hyundai A-League season ahead.

Adelaide United Head Coach Aurelio Vidmar has had the luxury of a longer pre-season campaign than the previous two years. Vidmar has saved his two most interesting signings for last with the addition of former Ghanaian international striker Lloyd Owusu from Cheltenham Town and Korean midfielder Inseob Shin from Kunkuk University. Owusu definitely has an eye for goal scoring 436 goals during his 11 year period in the English Championship, League One and League Two competitions.

Twenty year-old Shin, as he prefers to be known as, impressed the Adelaide United coaching staff after a two-week trial and definitely looks to be a player to watch this season. Vidmar also signed local boys Joe Costa and Francesco Monterosso following their



performances in last season's National Youth League.

Adelaide United's pre-season match schedule has focused mainly on local state league clubs and the South Australian representative team as well as fixtures against Perth Glory at home, North Queensland Fury in Darwin and their traditional pre-season match against Melbourne Victory in Launceston, Tasmania this weekend.

The Brisbane Roar embarked on their annual pre-season "Roar Roadshow" with Head Coach Frank Farina scheduling 11 fixtures in the lead-up to their opening match blockbuster against local rivals Gold Coast United on Saturday 8 August at Suncorp Stadium.

Although the majority of the Roar's opposition has been local Brisbane state league clubs at suburban venues, their biggest test was against Scottish Premier League powerhouse club Celtic FC in the annual Translink Cup.

Unfortunately for the Roar they were defeated 0-3, but took many positives out of the match including the memory of an electric stadium atmosphere generated from the 31,340 fans in attendance.

After participating in their first AFC Champions League campaign, the Central Coast Mariners took a well deserved break and then re-grouped at the start of June to focus on the season ahead. Lawrie McKinna has added English defender Chris Doig and promoted National Youth League player Matthew Lewis to his squad and released Andre Gumprecht, Paul O'Grady and Greg Owens.

The Mariners have been undefeated in their six pre-season fixtures to date, a statistic that McKinna hopes his team can take into and continue throughout the season proper.

Gold Coast United have completed their Hyundai A-League player roster with the recent signing of nineteen year-old Ivorian defender Adama Traore. Traore appeared on Miron Bleiberg's radar via some DVD's that landed on his desk and after a short trial period was promptly offered a contract.

Gold Coast United has travelled extensively during the pre-season with fixtures played in New Caledonia, Singapore and Hong Kong. Like the Mariners, Gold Coast United has been undefeated in their seven pre-season matches to date. The most impressive result being their 2-1 win over English Premier League Club Fulham FC.

Melbourne Victory pulled off their biggest signing coups in the off-season when they announced that Club Captain Kevin Muscat had signed on for another year along with the successful transfer of Costa Rican Carlos Hernandez to the club for the next 3 years. In addition, the Victory signed twenty six year-old Thai international defender Surat Sukha on a two-year deal.

Unfortunately, foundation goalkeeper Michael Theoklitos was released to take up a contract with English League One Club Norwich City, whilst Jose Luis Lopez mutually ended his loan period with Melbourne Victory, to allow him to return to Costa Rica in the hope of claiming a place in the national team leading into the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa.

Head Coach Ernie Merrick took his team to China for matches against Guangzhou and Tianjin and also had an eventful road-trip to Queenstown, New Zealand, for a match against Wellington Phoenix in very chilly conditions. In their other major pre-season match Melbourne Victory was defeated 0-3 by Fulham FC at Etihad Stadium.

The Newcastle Jets made it out of the group stage in their first foray into the AFC Champions League but were knocked out by Korean club Pohang Steelers in the Round of 16 last month.

Since then, the Jets have signed Brodie Mooy and Sean Rooney after their impressive AFC Champions League performances and also appointed Branko Culina as their Head Coach. Culina has had his eye on a number of trialists in the past week and is expected to make his final squad signings in the near future.

Due to their heavy match schedule during the "off-season", the Jets have played fewer pre-season friendlies in comparison to the other clubs, but no doubt they will be looking for a flying start come round 1.

North Queensland Fury has had an interesting pre-season with only one win from their nine matches but have learned plenty from the experience. The highlight so far was seeing their inaugural marquee player, Robbie Fowler, score on debut against newly promoted English Premier League Club Wolverhampton Wanderers in Perth.

The addition of Qantas Young Socceros Osama Malik and former youth international David Williams will also provide plenty of speed and excitement for the Fury. Felipe, Marton Vass and Brendon Santalab will not line up for North Queensland this season with Felipe and Vass mutually terminating their contracts and Santalab moving to Chinese Super League outfit Chengdu Blades.

Perth Glory have continued their audacious recruitment program with the signings of Qantas Socceros Mile Sterjovski and Chris Coyne along with English defender Andy Todd and Serbian striker Branko Jelic. Twenty year-old Western Australian born and bred goalkeeper Aleks Vrteski returns to Perth Glory after spending the past season in Macedonia with FK Pobeda.

On the field, Perth Glory's pre-season campaign hasn't been as successful

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