



Around the Grounds

NSW Super League Round 6 Preview

Two top four clashes catch the eye this weekend with leaders Spirit FC travelling across town to Hensley Field to face fourth placed Sydney University while second placed St George, who leap-frogged Central Coast after their mid week win, travel to Plum Park. Spirit, one of only two undefeated sides left in the competition, took over top spot last week and have looked good value so far. It will be an interesting few weeks for the leaders who, after overcoming St George last Sunday, follow Uni this week with a home match against previous leaders Central Coast. It will be a tough period but if Spirit can come through that unscathed, it augers well for their season. Their defence was superb last Sunday but they will need to do without the services of Tom Lovell for the foreseeable future, Lovell being stretchered off on the weekend. University have snuck up to fourth after two wins on the trot. They will improve too as the season moves along, remembering of course that they still have a catch up game to play. It will pay not to underestimate the Students. Central Coast will want to rebound after their first loss of the season. They face a St George side who recovered from their loss to Spirit by defeating Fraser Park on Wednesday night. It keeps St George well on the tail of Spirit and another win here is vital to keep pace. But the Coast will want to do likewise and won't want to suffer two defeats in a row. This will be tight, and close. A late kick off change will see this match commence at 7pm. Macarthur Rams have slipped down to tenth after two successive losses. It is a sign of how close the competition table is that a loss or two can see a slide of that proportion. They meet West Sydney Berries at Lynwood Park on Saturday, the Berries finally having got their first win last week. It may be just what West Sydney needed too, as they certainly expected to be challenging for the title and now that a win has come, the pressure is off somewhat. Following the retirement of James Stubbs-Mills, their defence will need some alteration but Steve Karavatakis is confident that he has the squad to cover that loss. Fraser Park meet lowly Hills Brumbies, also on Saturday. Fraser Park lost again midweek, hot on the heels of their loss last Saturday and will need to regain their good early season form. The severe injury crisis is not helping matters and they will still be without a number of first team selections. Fred Umlil has returned though and he will add experience to the lineup. Hills Brumbies will need to start gaining points if they are not to drift away at the bottom. There is a gap starting to occur between the bottom two and the rest of the table and it will be a long season if things don't start to turn around soon. There are two Sunday matches this round. Granville Rage have been steady in mid table without catching too much attention and they meet Blacktown Spartans at Garside Park. The Rage have the quality and strength to have a successful season, and have probably enjoyed the focus being placed on others. They still have a catch up game to play too, scheduled for Thursday 21 April against Sydney Uni, and so the potential is there to have a rapid climb over the next week or so. But the Spartans won't be easy to knock over. They were the first to defeat Central Coast this season and have always proved difficult to beat. They have some quality players too, with Super League experience, and the Rage will need to be on the lookout. Northern Tigers, the other club apart from Spirit to be undefeated, face Dulwich Hill at home. The Tigers got their first win last weekend, finally overpowering Fraser Park at the end, in a dominant second half performance. They will be a relieved lot, and will now expect to climb the table. Dulwich Hill are still seeking their first win, which is bound to come soon, a victory at Mills Park will be a great shot in the arm. Catch Up fixture: St George v Fraser Park. St George didn't waste any time in getting back into the winning groove when they defeated Fraser Park 3-1 on Wednesday night in their re-arranged round two clash. It took only nine minutes for the Saints to get on the scoresheet, James Kovas netting for his second of the season. Reuben Lagos made it two before twenty minutes were up and things were looking good for the home side. A penalty though to Fraser Park, awarded for handball, gave the visitors the chance to reduce the deficit but Daniel Nash saved well, denying Fred Umlil's spot kick. A cracker of a goal from Ivo de Jesus from the edge of the 'D', not for the first time, gave St George a healthy 3-0 lead before a late goal from Masanari Omura, with just three minutes left, got Fraser Park some consolation. St George 3 (James Kovas 9', Reuben Lagos 18', Ivo De Jesus 69') v Fraser Park 1 (Masanari Omura 87')

-By Peter Rowney



NSW Premier League Round 4 Preview

Rockdale City Suns and Marconi Stallions kick-start Round 4 action on Saturday evening at Ilinden Sports Centre with both sides desperate for a win following indifferent starts to the season. The Suns come off a heavy defeat at the hands of Sydney United last weekend, though the team will be eager to get out in front of their home crowd and get their season back on track. Rockdale City will look to build on the confident start made against the Reds last weekend, before the wheels fell off in the wet conditions at Edensor Park. The clash also marks a first official match for coach Lee Sterrey, striker Jason Naidovski and left-sided defender Giorgio Speranza against their former club. The Stallions start to the season was phenomenal with an opening round win at Bankstown City, though a loss against Sydney United and a late draw at home against Manly United FC has slowed the Stallions down somewhat over the last fortnight. Positive signs for coach Luke Casserly are the good form of leader Nahuel Arrarte out of midfield, meanwhile striker Matthew Mayora has found his scoring touch following his brace last weekend. At Seymour Shaw, Sutherland Sharks will look to keep hold of top-spot when the newly promoted Parramatta FC visit Miranda. The Sharks showed they are back for a real tilt at the title this season with impeccable performances against both Blacktown City FC and Sydney Olympic at home, and with the likes of Matt Bailey in scintillating form, Parramatta FC will have their work cut out on Saturday evening. Brian Dene's men have proven they can mix it with the big boys, and their compact defence will need to be on their game to cope with the likes of Bailey, Sam Awad, Nick Stavroulakis and Panni Nikas. Youngster Karim Reda proved his worth against Blacktown City FC and may just be given another start in defence in this big clash for Parramatta FC. Out of midfield, Chris Camilleri and Ben Delicata will again pull the strings with the help of Bryan Soane, even though some injury concerns surround Delicata after he was forced to leave the field early last weekend with a strain. On Sunday afternoon, Manly United FC will be looking for their first win of the season following three draws from three starts. Craig Midgley has instilled some real fight in his group, with Manly United securing their three draws in the dying stages of each of the matches to-date. 'Super sub' Justin Hayward was the toast of the town last weekend with his brace late in the second-half, as Robbie Cattanech and import signing Sueng Soo Lee also find their feet in this early part of the season. Sydney Olympic's visit to Cromer Park will prove a big test for Manly United FC, despite the Blues losing their first match of the season against Sutherland in Round 3. Led in the goalscoring stakes by Alex Smith, Peter Tsekenis' side has proven to be constantly improving despite all the offseason changes to personnel, and the players will be burning to get back on the winner's list after the loss to the Sharks at Seymour Shaw. South Coast Wolves will be out to make three-on-the-trot this Sunday when they host Bankstown City at John Crehan Park. The return to the South Coast of Sasho Petrovski has proven very handy, with the Wolves sitting in fourth-spot on the ladder - one-point behind the League leaders. Petrovski has certainly influenced the club on the pitch with his wealth of experience benefiting the entire Wolves group. Midfielder Chris Nathaniel was instrumental against the A.P.I.A.-Leichhardt Tigers last weekend, meanwhile the defensive line with Jacob Timpano, David Abel and Alex Mansueto is certainly finding its feet with some strong performances. Bankstown City

will go out searching for a win, as Blagoja Kuleski's men can extract confidence from the recent draw against Bonnyrigg White Eagles. Despite falling quite heavily against Marconi in Round 1, Bankstown City has managed a win and a draw in Rounds 2 and 3 to prove they are certainly going to cause adversaries some headaches this season. Daniel Slaveski and Steven Bozinovski have both been in good touch, with the side in need of more goals from their strikers. Defensively, following the opening day hiccup, Bankstown City have not conceded in 180' minutes of football - a positive sign considering Bonnyrigg White Eagles were the opponents last weekend. At Lily Homes Stadium, both Blacktown City FC and A.P.I.A.-Leichhardt Tigers are in need of points to get their respective seasons on track, even at this early point. The two sides sit on one and two points respectively, a far cry for both clubs who featured in the finals series in 2010. Blacktown City will be looking to maintain the tempo shown against Parramatta FC last weekend, though coach Brian Crittenden will be hoping his strikers improve their conversion rates in-front of goal following a plethora of chances that went begging in the last round. Captain Luke Roodenburg's fitness is a slight concern for the home side - Roodenburg was forced to leave the field with a strain last weekend, moments before Parramatta found their late equaliser. The Tigers too have not made a terrific start this season, though the signs that the team are playing their way to some better form are certainly there. A dominant second-half performance against the Wolves in Round 3 will be pleasing for the Tigers supporters, as were the two late goals scored in the same encounter. The Tigers' objective will be to remain tight in defence this weekend and not give away a lead as was the case against South Coast. The likes of Sam Messam and Chris James have settled in well, and if Robert Younis and Franco Parisi can be fed some good possession, the side will provide Blacktown City with a real test on Sunday. The blockbuster for the weekend sees Bonnyrigg White Eagles and Sydney United lock heads - which is a members only match. Despite form not counting for too much in big matches such as these, Sydney United, for the first time in recent memory, do carry the edge with a much more positive start to the season. The Reds were phenomenal against Rockdale City last weekend - led exceptionally well in the front third by Steve Hayes and hat-trick hero Elsid Barkhousir. Sydney United have also added the scalp of Marconi Stallions to their 2011 list of victories, meanwhile Manly United salvaged a point in the opening round of the season deep into injury time. Bonnyrigg has made a surprisingly slow start, at least in terms of results, this season with the side scoring three consecutive draws from the opening three matches. Brian Brown's men have dominated the greater part of each match to-date, though the goals have not been so free-flowing out of midfield as they were in 2010. The White Eagles will be without Brad Boardman for this clash following the striker's two yellow cards against Bankstown City last weekend, placing a little extra pressure on the likes of Nathan Elasi and Daniel Severino to get further forward and find the goals. The matchup will certainly provide a lot of passion on the pitch, and a win for either side will go a long way in providing a springboard for a successful 2011 campaign.

-By Joseph Carlucci