

Around the Grounds

NSW PREMIER LEAGUE ROUND 16 – PREVIEW

Joseph Carlucci

Sutherland Sharks have the opportunity to cut Sydney Olympic's lead at the top of the League ladder – at least for 24-hours – as the team opens Round 16 proceedings with the visit of A.P.I.A.-Leichhardt Tigers at Seymour Shaw on Saturday.

The Sharks weekend off due to the Waratah Cup grand-final would have helped the team understand its current run of form following consecutive losses in Rounds 14 and 15. Coach Robbie Stanton will welcome back Jim Bakis after the midfielder missed the last League match due to suspension, and the side will need their experienced right-sided player at his best against the Tigers.

The Tigers have suffered several setbacks this season with a horrible run over May and June. With a number of injuries surrounding the side, and a very obvious loss in confidence, the side must return to basics to overcome a stern test against the Sharks. Captain Franco Parisi is still on the mend from injury, meanwhile striking partner Robbie Younis has still to find his range since his month off in June. The Tigers will need to plug up the gaps in defence to avoid another defeat, one that would certainly open the doors for bottom-placed Parramatta FC to move away from the foot of the table.

At Bonnyrigg Sports Club, the White Eagles and Marconi Stallions meet in a local derby where points are needed by both sides. Bonnyrigg has shown their ability over the past six weeks, turning the corner after a very sluggish start to the season. Coach Brian Brown will launch newest signing, Brendan Gan against the Stallions, as goal scoring duties will fall upon Brad Boardman. Defensively, the White Eagles have remained solid in recent weeks with Andrew Bazi adding extra confidence for the defensive line.

The Stallions sit five-points behind Bonnyrigg and Luke Casserly's men will need a result to keep the pressure on for a finals series berth. The Stallions will need to quickly recover following their total capitulation against Rockdale City Suns a fortnight ago. The side led 1-0, only to concede two goals late on and

squander three-points. With tricky encounters against South Coast Wolves and Blacktown City to follow in the coming two weeks, the side must avoid defeat on Saturday evening to get some momentum going in the run home.

League leader Sydney Olympic face a very tricky encounter against Parramatta FC on Sunday afternoon at Belmore Sports Ground with the Blues well aware of the Eagles ability with recent victories against Sutherland Sharks and Blacktown City FC opening the eyes of many observers. The Eagles have enjoyed a positive run of results since the arrival of Manny Spanoudakis at the helm. Spanoudakis returns to his former club, making the encounter a very significant one on Sunday. The Eagles have been bolstered by Chris Camilleri's return to fitness after a month long layoff, meanwhile Daniel Fogarty's recent form alongside the experienced likes of Matthew Osman and defender Evangelos Petratos have added much needed confidence to the club.

The Eagles will have a challenge on their hands against Sydney Olympic, with the Blues certainly shaken up following their loss against Manly United in Round 15. Coach Peter Tsekens recently picked out complacency as something he wanted his players to avoid after opening a seven-point lead following Round 14, and the Blues boss will certainly be expecting more from his players this weekend. The Blues have lost the services of Daniel Severino – the former Bonnyrigg White Eagles' attacking midfielder has moved on to A-League side Gold Coast United – leaving Robbie Mileski with the playmaker responsibilities. A win for the Blues will be a big boost for the side's bid to close in on the Premiership, though the Eagles will be out to continue their recent 'giant killing' form.

At Ilinden Sports Ground, newly crowned Waratah Cup champion, Manly United FC, take on high-flying Rockdale City Suns in a very important match for both sides' aspirations of playing finals football. Manly United have hit some fine form in the second part of the sea-



son, with the relatively young squad playing some very good attacking football under the guidance of coach Craig Midgley. The Cromer Park outfit will be still on a high following last weekend's emphatic Cup win, though captain Marc Richards will be sure to display his experience and lead the younger heads for a tilt at the title. Rockdale City Suns have also enjoyed a positive run in recent weeks, collecting six points from their last two outings – the most recent, a 3-0 defeat of A.P.I.A.-Leichhardt Tigers last Saturday, a re-scheduled fixture from last month. Striker Jason Naidovski has enjoyed a return to the scorer's list, meanwhile the impact of Adem Kir has been phenomenal. The Suns, sitting three-points outside the Top-Five, will need to make the most of home ground advantage if the side is going to stand a chance of a final dash towards the playoffs.

South Coast Wolves play host to Sydney United on Sunday with Trevor Morgan's men in danger of finding themselves at the foot of the table following this weekend in the case of a loss and other results not going their way. The Wolves have played some very good football this season, though Mark Picciolini and Sasho Petrovski's goals have not been enough to steer the side away from the bottom of the ladder.

With Sydney United visiting on Sunday, the Wolves supporters could not have asked for a more difficult encounter to get their season going. The Reds have shown they are still a contender for the title despite a mid-season slump, which coincided with the side's elimination from the Waratah Cup last month. The Reds boast a very experienced squad with an abundance of talent across the park, leaving coach Jean-Paul De Marigny with a selection headache each week. Steve Hayes' creativity out of midfield has been brilliant this season, as has the contribution of Ufuk Talay who continues to lift his fitness levels after missing much of the early season.

In the final match of the round, stern rivals Blacktown City FC and Bankstown City lock horns at Lily Homes Stadium. Both sides have a point to prove as both still stand a strong chance of finishing in the Top-Five. Blacktown City will still be seething after dropping points in their last home fixture against Parramatta FC. The side took out their frustrations against A.P.I.A.-Leichhardt one week later, though nothing less than three-points against the Lions will be accepted this weekend. Coach Mark Crittenden will again look to his experienced campaigners Luke Roodenburg and Milorad Simonovic to lead the way, with young guns Mitchell Duke and Travis Major constantly proving their abilities with some very consistent showings this season.

Bankstown City has turned the corner following a very slow start to the campaign, full credit to experienced manager Blagoja Kuleski who never showed any sign of panic when the results weren't there. Kuleski has added the talents of Sean Mitchell and Chris Bedzo to his squad, the latter with a point to prove against his former side this weekend.

A win for the Lions will further boost the side's chances of finals football, meanwhile a Blacktown City FC victory will give the side some breathing space with Rockdale City Suns and Manly United FC – the two closest rivals behind the Blacktown side - facing off at Ilinden Sports Ground.

Round 16

TIME	HOME TEAM	AWAY TEAM	VENUE
7:00 PM Sat 16/Jul	Bonnyrigg White Eagles vs	Marconi Stallions	Bonnyrigg Sports Club
7:00 PM Sat 16/Jul	Sutherland Sharks vs	APIA Leichhardt Tigers	Seymour Shaw Park
3:00 PM Sun 17/Jul	Sydney Olympic vs	Parramatta FC	Belmore Sports Ground
3:00 PM Sun 17/Jul	Rockdale City Suns vs	Manly United FC	Ilinden Sports Centre
3:00 PM Sun 17/Jul	South Coast Wolves vs	Sydney United	John Crehan Park
3:00 PM Sun 17/Jul	Blacktown City FC vs	Bankstown City	Lily Homes

Table After Round 15

POS	TEAM	P	W-L-D	F-A	GD	PTS
1.	Sydney Olympic	15	10-3-2	27-15	12	32
2.	Sydney United	14	7-2-5	24-14	10	26
3.	Sutherland Sharks	15	7-4-4	21-18	3	25
4.	Bonnyrigg White Eagles	15	6-3-6	21-15	6	24
5.	Blacktown City FC	15	7-6-2	20-15	5	23
6.	Rockdale City Suns	15	6-7-2	17-19	-2	20
7.	Manly United FC	14	5-4-5	23-27	-4	20
8.	Marconi Stallions	15	5-6-4	18-15	3	19
9.	Bankstown City	15	5-7-3	21-25	-4	18
10.	South Coast Wolves	14	4-9-1	18-27	-9	13
11.	APIA Leichhardt Tigers	15	3-8-4	18-28	-10	13
12.	Parramatta FC	14	3-9-2	13-23	-10	11