

# Spartans reaching for the stars after successful 2011 season

When the 2011 Super League season kicked off, there would have been few who would have selected Blacktown Spartans to take the title.

The usual big guns of Macarthur Rams, Northern Tigers, Spirit FC, St George and the newly relegated West Sydney Berries would have been most people's tips for the premiership. But the club from the Blacktown and Districts Football Association surprised many when they claimed the title with a round to spare, defeating closest challengers West Sydney Berries to take the premiership in only their first season in Super League. Blacktown Spartans gained promotion after finishing second to Hills Brumbies in the first division last season, moving up to Super League courtesy of the vacancy created by the demise of FC Bossy Liverpool. It has been a meteoric rise for the Spartans who only entered the Football NSW competitions in 2005. In only seven short years, the club has now risen to the top of the state footballing pyramid, earning the right to play in the Premier League next season.

### For coach Ben de Haan, the year has been nothing short of sensational.

"There were no expectations or aims at the start of the year, we just were prepared to take it game by game and to improve each week. But winning the premiership has clearly been the most pleasing aspect of the season. And recruiting a team that has got along so well together has also made it a very enjoyable time as well," he said. Despite running a close second to the Brumbies last year, the Spartans were in no doubt that the squad would need to be strengthened for

Super League. Only eight players were retained from the division one campaign with no less than eleven players signing on for this season, most notably perhaps Tom Spencer from championship winning Northern Tigers, Peter Hubbard and James Young from Dulwich Hill and captain Luke Boyd from Schofields.

### De Haan was certain the squad needed new recruits.

"I saw that we needed a more experienced squad and the players that were chosen have lived up to expectations. I noticed Luke Boyd playing for Schofields and saw that he was a great player as well as a great leader. His direction is where I wanted the team to head and with Tom Spencer, who shares the leadership with Luke, they have made my job a lot easier". If there are any doubts that the Spartans would be competitive against Premier League opposition, that thought should be dispelled when a review of their Waratah Cup runs over the past two seasons are considered. Blacktown Spartans have made the semi finals on the last two occasions, defeating Rockdale and Sydney United in 2010, and only going out in the semis to Marconi after extra time, while in 2011, the Spartans beat APIA Leichardt at Lambert Park on their run to another semi final appearance.

### Those performances only add to De Haan's confidence for next season.

"I am certain that we will be com-

petitive next season. But the Waratah Cup is a different competition from week to week league fixtures. But it has been great to play the Premier League teams in the Cup, as these are the fixtures that I love the most".

### Tom Spencer, who has topped the scoring charts for the Spartans this season with eight goals, has continued on where he left off last season, where he was top scorer at Northern Tigers, finishing last year with eleven goals. But it was a big decision to leave the Tigers, as Spencer explains.

"It was an extremely hard decision moving from the Tigers as they had looked after me very well for a number of seasons. I had won the premiership with them in 2007 and won the Grand Final last year so I had won it all at the Tigers. I thought this time would be a good time to move to a new club and prove myself with a newly promoted team. And of course, Blacktown being a lot closer to home also influenced my decision".

### The difference between last season and this, where the lead changed regularly, played its part in the Spartans success too.

"This season was very strange", said Spencer. "Every week teams were beating each other and no one knew who was going to win the premiership up until the final few weeks. I feel that winning the Premiership this year is a bigger deal than winning the Grand Final last year. We finished first after twenty two rounds of football and I feel that shows we were the best team all year. I know that some

teams disagree that we deserve the title, but we figured out ways to grind out results, something other teams struggled to do".

### And the season is not over yet. "We would love nothing more than to win the double at Spartans", he finished.

### Luke Boyd, as captain of the Spartans in his first season at the club, was not surprised at the Spartans' success.

"We knew we had a strong squad and that Benny had recruited well. All of our players had played at this level or higher, and it was like having eleven leaders every week".

### The on field success has been replicated off the field as well. This year will be their final season at Francis Park, with the club moving premises to Blacktown Sports Park (formerly Blacktown Olympic Park) in Doonside, with its new Association offices, training facilities and artificial main pitch, in time for 2012. John Todd, president of the Blacktown Spartans, was certain that the club is ready to take the leap into the NSW Premier League in 2012.

"We are ready to take promotion. We are confident that we can attract some new players to be competitive in the Premier League, and with our Youth League currently second in the Club Championship, all our representative teams, Mens, Youth and Womens, will be playing Premier League football. "We have the finances and we are ready to go," he said.

## Former NSW Premier League player Jason Trifiro wins Victorian Premier League Gold Medal

Former Marconi Stallions, Sutherland Sharks and South Coast Wolves midfielder Jason Trifiro was crowned the 2011 Alanic Victorian Premier League Gold Medal Player of the Year on Monday evening in his debut season in the competition.

The 23-year-old Glenwood born player had a superb season with Northcote City and won the prestigious honour of being named the 2011 Gold Medal award winner on the final round beating Green Gully Cavaliers' Graham Hockless 26 to 24. A former youth international at Under 17 level, Trifiro played for the South Coast Wolves in 2010 before jetting off to Melbourne with younger brother Glen, who also signed with Northcote.

The brothers spent a solid season in the Victorian Premier League where they grabbed the headlines and after being awarded this medal, have been hot property for a number of Victorian and NSW Pre-



Former Marconi Stallions, Sutherland Sharks and South Coast Wolves midfielder Jason Trifiro (R) was crowned the 2011 Alanic Victorian Premier League Gold Medal Player of the Year.

mier League clubs. Trifiro stated that there were differences between the NSW and Victorian Premier League standard of football since moving to Melbourne at the start of 2011. "Coming from Wollongong last year then coming to Victoria I noticed that there were differences with both competitions. "I think that the Victorian Premier League is a lot tougher and a lot more physical, win at all costs type of stuff. "I was honoured though when my name was read but I wanted to thank my brother, my team mates and my coaching staff for making it easier for me to adjust to the football here in Melbourne." Trifiro hopes that this honour can spearhead him towards a potential Hyundai A-League contract but insists that he wants to continue playing football with a smile. "You always have that hope that you can slowly reach the next level, the next level being A-League but I am just happy here playing and enjoying myself."