

FOOTBALL NSW

NSW SUPER LEAGUE GRAND FINAL PREVIEW

NSW Super League Fixtures
(Jensen Park)**Saturday 17th September**

First Grade - Blacktown Spartans v West Sydney Berries - 4.30pm

Grade 20s - Sydney University v GHFA Spirit FC - 2pm

The Super League season draws to a close this Saturday when premiers Blacktown Spartans and second placed West Sydney Berries meet at Jensen Park at 4.30pm in what promises to be a tumultuous finale.

It will be a chance for the Spartans to claim the Championship as well as the Premiership this season, it having been a few years now since the premiers even made the Grand Final. It would be the perfect ending to a Spartans season which has also seen them make the Waratah Cup semi finals in an impressive year. Blacktown have had a settled side for much of the year, the

sure-footed keeper Carlos Saliadarre manning the goals while Peter Hubbard, in more recent times, and Danny Wells have formed a strong central defensive partnership. The Spartans midfield is perhaps their engine room where Tom Spencer, captain Luke Boyd and Simon Zahra work the ball forward looking for the likes of Todd Macrae, James Young and Glen McPherson.

It has been an attack minded outfit at Francis Park with coach Ben de Haan, in his third season at Spartans, thinking nothing of throwing men forward in the search for goals. Add in the likes of the experienced Mario Ghobrial and the Spartans are not shy of players who can hit the back of the net. But West Sydney Berries will be ready. You can sense that the Berries feel aggrieved by

the loss of the Premiership, when it seemed theirs for the taking, and it would be sweet revenge if they were able to win the Grand Final. They will need to do so without central defender Jack Sobczyk, who was sent off against St George last Sunday, which should see Liam McKenna partner Damon Collina at the back. The Berries may be concerned about Stefan de Jesus too, who was carried off in the preliminary final. But like the Spartans, the Berries have a strong squad, and have ample cover. They certainly don't lack experience, at Premier League level too, and it will be to captain



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Ante Deur and Collina that the Berries will look for guidance. Up front, Dimitri Zakilas and Kodjo Adjassou are likely to form the two pronged attack, though John Tsironis, who came on and scored the equaliser last Sunday is sure to make an appearance at some stage. There is really very little between the two sides, but the Spartans do have the better track record. They remain undefeated against the Berries this season, claiming two 1-0 wins during the regular season while

getting through to the Grand Final on penalties. That is something the Berries would love to correct and there is no better stage than a Grand Final. They will certainly be match fit, having had three tough finals games while Blacktown Spartans may be a little underdone, this being only their second game in five weeks. Whether that is an advantage or disadvantage, we can only wait and see. But one thing is for sure, the Grand Final will be a fitting end to an engrossing Super League season.

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GRAND FINAL MATCH DETAILS

First Grade - Mounties Wanderers v Gladesville Ryde Magic - 5pm

Grade 20's - Mounties Wanderers vs Schofields Scorpions - 2-30pm

***To be played at Cook Park, Mount Pritchard**

The 2011 State League Division One competition reaches a thrilling climax on Sunday evening, September 18, when Premiers, Mounties Wanderers, welcome Gladesville Ryde Magic to Cook Park.

The season decider kicks off at the later-than-usual time of 5-00pm, and is preceded by the Under 20s Grand Final between Mounties Wanderers and Schofields Scorpions, making it a special day to remember for the club. As the Premiers, Mounties had a rest during the first week of the Finals Series, before downing Fairfield City Lions by 2-0 in

the Semi Final to earn their spot in the season decider, grabbing yet another week's rest in between. Gladesville Ryde Magic have definitely done it the hard way to get to the season's showdown match. Week One of the Finals Series saw the Magic lose 0-1 to Fairfield City in the Qualifying Final, before bouncing back to overcome UNSW 2-1 in the Semi Final in Week Two, coming from 0-1 down midway through the second half in the process. Next it was the Preliminary Final against the Fairfield City Lions, and an opportunity to exact revenge. Down 1-0 with three minutes to play, the Magic scored a last gasp equalizer, forcing the match into extra time, before they snatched victory 2-1. There will be some enticing duels coming up on Sunday which will be instrumental in which way the match pans out. Both goalkeepers are arguably the best two shot stoppers in the competition. Ali Akbal of Mounties has had a stellar season for the Wanderers, and has conceded the fewest goals in the League with only 13 getting past him. A vocal, athletic and courageous keeper, Akbal has often been a final hurdle for opposition

attackers if they ever venture beyond the team's brick wall defence. Gladesville Ryde Magic can boast a former UEFA Champions League player as their custodian, with Kiriakos Tohouroglou having plied his trade at Olympiakos and PAOK Salonika before returning home to play for his boyhood club. Tohouroglou has been a steadying influence as captain, keeping his troops calm as they made their way through to the Grand Final. The Mounties defensive wall is headed by the 'twin towers', Mark D'Alessandro and Scott Goodwin. 'Della' has been absolutely incredible in 2011, fierce in the tackles, unbeatable in the air, and leads by example by putting his body on the line time and time again. Scott Goodwin is a basically a replica of his central defensive partner, a tough competitor who will usually take the reins of man marking the opposition centre forward. That centre forward on Sunday will be Andrew McKie, Gladesville's burly target man, who has had a solid second half of the season, finding the net on 7 occasions in total in 2011. Andrew will have to make do without his brother and playmaker, Alistair, who

misses the big one through suspension after collecting his second yellow card - and subsequent red - in extra time of last Sunday's triumph over Fairfield City Lions. Alan Ryan has had a fantastic Final Series for Gladesville Ryde Magic, a real tireless worker who simply just does not stop running in the midfield. He'll have to pull out yet another big one on Sunday when he goes head to head with Mounties skipper, Daniel McCann, who has been one of the competition's best players, a goalscoring box-to-box midfielder with a thirst for success. If the Magic are to stem the Mounties onslaught, they need to venture where no other team has gone, and somehow stop the Wanderers attack that has averaged about three goals per game in 2011. The tall figure of Eli Squillaciotti spearheads

the Mounties attack, having notched 11 goals this season, ably supported by the speedy veteran, Greg Baldock (10 goals), whilst pint sized Mark Symington and the lurking Daniel Willoughby have both managed 8 goals for the campaign. Gladesville's defensive pairing of Brett Townley-Jones and Alex Morris will give as good as they get, and both have had solid matches in the lead up to the Grand Final, so will need to be on their toes once again no doubt if they are to help keep the Mounties at bay.

Both competitive matches this season have resulted in victories for the Mounties Wanderers. Back in Round 2 on March 27, the Wanderers were merciless when they thumped the Magic 4-0 at Magdala Park. The floodgates opened after a scoreless first

half, with Baldock grabbing a quickfire brace (48' / 53') before Willoughby (71') and Squillaciotti (77') rounded off the scoring. The return fixture on June 19 in Round 13 at Cook Park finished 2-0 to the Mounties, Willoughby (65') and Ian McAndrew (68') doing the honours. Will one game in a month disrupt the momentum for the Mounties, or will the rest put them in a fresh state of mind, physically as well as mentally, for the big one on Sunday? Will the determination and 'backs-against-the-wall' stuff in recent weeks put Gladesville in good stead for Sunday's final, or will the run of good fortune come to an end for the Magic? Get out to Cook Park on Sunday to see how it all unravels, as the State League One competition reaches an enthralling and exciting conclusion.



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