

## news

NSW PREMIER LEAGUE  
ROUND 8 PREVIEW

Joseph Carlucci

**Parramatta FC v Sutherland Sharks, Saturday 19th of May, 7:00 pm Melita Stadium**

Lee Sterrey's young side will be aiming to build on the exceptional result in Wollongong last weekend, where the 'unfancied' Eagles snatched a point from the high-flying Wolves. Led in attack by the lightning quick Kwabena Appiah-Kubi, Sterrey has been able to lift the confidence of his youthful side since the start of the season. Goalkeeper Matthew Nash has added his experience in between the sticks, meanwhile Nicolas McInerney and Bryan Soane have been instrumental in their roles. With the expectation of victory on the shoulders of the Sharks, Parramatta FC may well play without any added pressure in search of the side's first win of the season. Sutherland's campaign has certainly started to come good after an inconsistent opening to the season. The Sharks were in great touch against Marconi last weekend, working hard for a deserved three-points against another serious contender for some silverware this season. The Sharks will be without George Souris through injury, the captain's experience and presence is without a doubt irreplaceable, though Stanton can definitely count on the defensive duo of Paul Cotte and Hayden Morton to call the shots across the backline. Propping up the captain's armband in Souris' absence will be midfielder Nick Stavroulakis who hopes

he can spur his side on to victory on Saturday. A tricky match for Sutherland at Melita Stadium, with the Seymour Shaw side not holding the best away record in recent seasons.

**Marconi Stallions v Bonnyrigg White Eagles, Saturday 19th of May, 7:00 pm Marconi Stadium**

Action aplenty is expected when Marconi and Bonnyrigg lock horns in a local derby that never fails to disappoint. The White Eagles currently lead the League ladder in what has proven to be a magical start to the campaign, meanwhile the Stallions have fallen off the pace despite their impressive open to the season. Marconi enter this contest coming off a 3-1 defeat at Sutherland, despite playing some good attacking football. Nathan Elasi and Keith Shevlin were the two men that caused the Sharks the most headaches last weekend, and both men will need to be at their best to give Bonnyrigg a challenge on Saturday. Defensively, the Stallions were a little sloppy with their marking, and with Robbie Younis on the prowl for the White Eagles, Marconi will need to keep things tight in the defensive third. Brian Brown's Bonnyrigg returned to winning ways last weekend following a loss to Sydney United, and the side seems to be improving gradually with each performance. Despite the array of young talent at

this disposal, Brown has managed to get the very best out of his chargers – a point illustrated by the White Eagles' current placing on the League ladder. The three points up for grabs on Sunday are very important for both sides – for very different reasons – so attacking football and goals are expected on Saturday evening.

**Sydney Olympic – South Coast Wolves, Saturday 19th of May, 7:00 pm Belmore Sports Ground**

Sydney Olympic will be looking for maximum points this weekend in a bid to return to the top-five after consecutive weeks without a win. The Blues play host to an in form South Coast Wolves, though a boisterous crowd at Belmore will definitely give the reigning champions the advantage on Saturday. Sydney Olympic has somewhat lost its way in recent weeks with a loss at APIA-Leichhardt followed up by a 2-2 draw at Blacktown City FC despite leading 2-0; albeit with the Blues fending for a large part of the encounter with nine-men. Coach Peter Tsekens will be without David Gullo and Emmanuel Giannaros, two big losses for such an important clash. On a positive note, Matthew Mayora's return to the club after a stint in the Indian Premier League adds further force in the front-third, where the goals for the Blues have not been too consistent in this early part of the season. The Wolves have been in great touch, however Trevor Morgan and his men will still feel disappointed about letting the lead against Parramatta FC, at home last weekend, slip twice. South Coast have already stunned Sydney United 58 FC on their travels this season, and the side will be out to back it up with another fine showing at Belmore this weekend. With only two-points separating the two sides on the ladder, a win for either will be a major shot in the arm to keep the pressure on the front-running Bonnyrigg White Eagles.

-By Mitchell Grima

He is the engine room in the Sutherland Sharks midfield and Nick Stavroulakis has become a talisman in the NSW Premier League. Stavroulakis, 27, has had a taste of football in Europe and a return to Australia was in no way the end of his professional ambitions. The tenacious midfielder was raised through the NSW youth representative system, but it was during a tour of Italy with the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) that a then 18-year-old received his first big break at Serie B club Empoli FC.

"Myself and Frank Lagana got spotted in a tournament then got invited to stay another week and we secured a contract in May 2003," Stavroulakis recalled.

It was a time when the norm for young Australian footballers was to either secure a contract in the NSL or immediately look for a contract overseas. So after Stavroulakis recovered from the shock of playing professional football in Tuscany, he turned his focus to gaining a more permanent role at the club. There was certainly motivation to succeed with Udinese forward Antonio Di Natale and Socceroo midfielder Vince Grella plying their trade in Empoli's first team at the time.

"We used to play against the first team every Thursday and to play and train against players like that is something that not many players get to do.

"Italy is a bit different, it was demanding in the sense that everything had to be perfect. "You had to stand up otherwise you would be off the park."

Stavroulakis learned about the volatile player management nature that year. He represented himself to get the contract at Empoli but hired an unlicensed agent who looked to secure a deal with fellow Serie B side Hellas Verona. The opportunity to play first team football at Verona was alluring to the youngster but after the deal fell through, the door was all but shut at Empoli. The midfielder returned to Australia in 2004 during the country's transition phase. After a short stint with Wollongong, the quest for full time football resumed as Stavroulakis earned a trial with English League Two side Peterborough.

The East of England looked to be a suitable home for Stavroulakis and he was in good company with fellow Aussies Pedj Bojic and Nicky Rizzo playing at neighbouring clubs.

Although it was in the lower leagues, Stavroulakis gained valuable experience in gritty football.

"There were games left, right and centre, so you had to adjust quickly because over there it's do or die," he said. "You don't have margin for error when it comes to performing, they didn't care whether you were coming from the other side of the world as long as you could do the business

week in week out." But fate plagued Stavroulakis' ambitions once more as turmoil at Peterborough led him back home.

Although his time in England was prematurely cut, Stavroulakis returned just a year into the A-League. That was enough motivation for him and Sutherland was happy to add his name to their player roster. In his first three years back in the NSW Premier League, Stavroulakis definitely made an impact. But 2009 was a breakthrough year when he received a call from Frank Farina at the Roar.

"Mass Murdocca got injured for 6-8 weeks and they were looking for a certain mould of player so I went there for two weeks.

"(Frank Farina) liked what he saw, he was giving me great feedback.

"He said 'if something happens, we'll look at bringing you in for the next pre season'."

The man  
behind the  
machine...

But timing – yet again – wasn't on his side. With Farina leaving the club shortly after the trial, Stavroulakis was booted back to the NSW Premier League. It wasn't all bad news, though, as Sutherland completed the 2009 season with the prestigious Waratah Cup and the championship. Although the A-League dream is still very much a focus for Stavroulakis, he is enjoying watching the state league grow in stature.

"It looks like it's going to be a tough competition this year, because a lot of the teams are really competitive," the 27-year-old said.

"That's a good thing for the league and the neutrals that watch.

"As a player you want it like that, although I still don't think there is enough respect for the league.

"But if you look at the teams there is a lot of talent, especially with young blokes coming through the clubs."

Stavroulakis has engaged with coaching at a grassroots level recently and says it is something he would like to pursue in the future. Although reluctant to accept the influence he has on younger players, the roving midfielder often finds himself acting as a mentor thanks to his experience.

"What I've done is nothing compared to many players out there.

"But I've been at Sutherland for six years and I've clocked up a few kilometres in the Premier League.

"I'm the type of senior player who is there to give advice to the younger boys.

"Whatever I can give to them I do and they listen to what myself and (Sharks captain) George Souris have to say."

Six weeks into the 2012 season, Stavroulakis has put all future goals aside to focus on bringing the title back to Seymour Shaw.

