

news

VRANKOVIC PENS TWO-YEAR DEAL WITH MELBOURNE HEART

One of the NSW Premier League's most promising young defenders, Bonnyrigg White Eagles' David Vrankovic has penned a two-year deal with Hyundai A-League outfit Melbourne Heart.

-BY MARK STAVROULAKIS

The 18-year-old who was also recently involved in the Young Socceroos squad during the AFC Under-22 Championship Qualifiers in Indonesia has been one of the standout players of the 2012 NSW Premier League season was rewarded for his efforts with a professional contract with the Heart. Melbourne Heart coach John Aloisi will look towards Vrankovic replacing former defenders Brendan Hamill who signed with K-League side Seongnam Ihwa and Curtis Good who is bound for the English Premier League with Newcastle United. Vrankovic, a former Westfield Sports High, NSWIS, Newcastle Jets and Sydney FC youth player is renowned for his composure on the

ball and his tackling skills as well as building from the back received the Bonnyrigg White Eagles well wishes during the club's round 16 NSW Premier League clash against Rockdale City Suns. White Eagles Football Manager George Mandic was delighted with Vrankovic's move to the Heart. "The entire Bonnyrigg White Eagles board, coaching staff, players and supporters has wished David all the best with his Hyundai A-League career at the Melbourne Heart. "We are very proud and honoured to see one of our rising players continue his development as a full-time footballer." The White Eagles presented Vrankovic with his playing strip signed by the entire squad commenced training with the Melbourne Heart this week.



NEW MELBOURNE Heart defender David Vrankovic shown with his former coaches Bonnyrigg White Eagles' Cliff Pointer and Brian Brown (Photo by Gavin Leung)

Tony Popovic is a big star in Australian football that needs absolutely no introduction

-BY JOE RUSSO

He has played for the Socceroos with distinction and has plied his trade at the highest levels on the world scene. In short, an ambassador of the highest quality. Towards the latter part of his career Popovic played for Sydney FC in the A-League and recently was the assistant coach of English club Crystal Palace.

However, once again he has returned to Australia and, just perhaps, will face the greatest challenge of his career as coach of the nascent Western Sydney Wanderers. Alongside his trusted assistant, former Socceroo Ante Milicic, Popovic can be seen at various NSW Premier League games scouting for talent. With the A-League season almost upon us, the Wanderers are still in the mountainous process of building a team from scratch. It's no easy task and Popovic is mindful of the challenges he faces. And it is here that the NSW Premier League will play a vital role. "It's important and I have been watching games regularly," he said. "I am always looking for talent for the first team and also the youth team." "We have added some talent to the youth team's roster who we have looked at through the state league. We are always on the lookout for talented players." It is no secret that the Wanderers do have a number of current NSW Premier League players on trial in the hope of securing a deal while the club has signed promising young former Parramatta FC striker Kwabena Appiah Kubi to its books. Western Sydney is

arguably the heartland of football in Australia because the region has produced some of the finest talent to have ever graced a football field. Popovic himself is part of this elite group – he went all the way to the top of his profession having started out at Sydney United. "We'll try to engage the community and we are already giving these boys an opportunity," he said. "Players are coming here to trial regularly and our youth team will be made up predominantly of players from the west. "We want to create a team and a club for the western region [of Sydney] and a club that they can be proud of and feel that they are a part of – that this is their club. "It takes time – we understand that – but step by step we hope to grow together, as a club and the whole region, and we'll become a big part of the community. "It's a bonus if you can get the players you want from this area, but we also want the quality that's required for the A-League and wherever we can find that we'll take it." On the playing side, just how is the team shaping up? "It's

a process: we have had three weeks training now, we are always on the lookout for talent, we have given a lot of boys an opportunity to trial from the state league and we'll keep doing that," he said. "Some of these boys will get the opportunity with a contract and hopefully they'll make the most of it." "There is a short term, medium term and long strategy in place for this club. In the long term, we aim to be one of the best clubs in the A-League. There are a lot of steps to get there but we want to be a club that's challenging regularly for honours by the time the four years are up [Popovic's contracted period]. "We have good young players in Australia and obviously there are good young players in this region and we want to be a pathway for kids in the west. "When they get to the age of 16 or 17, and they are not sure what they want to do, then they can see that there's a chance and a pathway to be a professional footballer and we want to provide that for them. "In the short term there is a process of creating a team that needs to be competitive from day one and slowly we'll build from there," he said.

