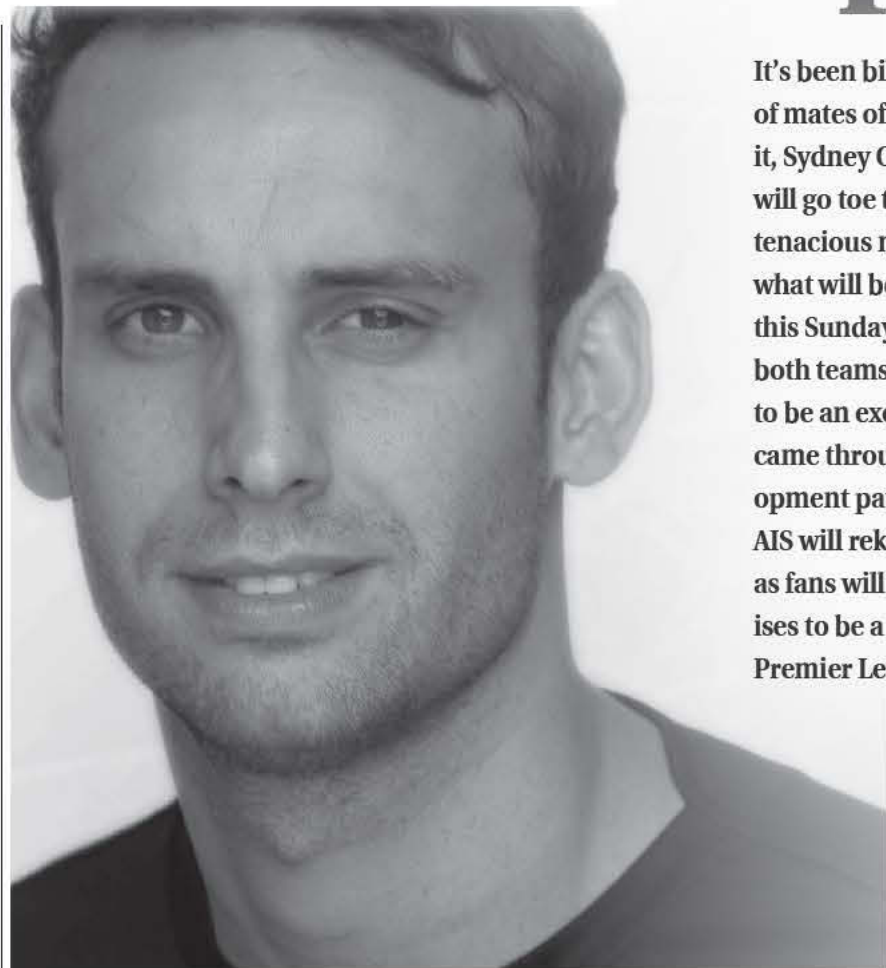


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Phillip Vs Nick



PHIL MAKRYS: "I THINK WE'LL WIN THE COMPETITION"

-By Matthew Connellan

Sydney Olympic midfielder and captain Phil Makrys is in the midst of another season of important contribution to his side.

He has led the team well, scoring seven goals so far, to go with the five he scored last year.

Sydney Olympic have charged into second position in the NSW Premier League the back of their stunning eight game winning streak and pivotal to this run has been the performances of Makrys, who scored the winner from the spot in their 1-0 victory over South Coast Wolves on Saturday evening.

A Sydney Olympic youth product, Makrys is currently in his third year back at the club.

"I was on scholarship at the AIS for a bit after playing my youth football at Olympic and then I spent four or five seasons playing first grade for Bankstown City Lions under Peter Tsekenis, before I returned to Olympic," he said.

Tsekenis' side has put together a remarkable run of results of late and Makrys says that he was a little surprised by the magnitude of their success this season.

"Yes, I'm surprised, especially considering that we lost Rob Mileski, Alex Smith and Richard Luksic. Although we have replaced them, I didn't think we'd do as well as we have without them," he said.

Makrys was keen to emphasise the impact that the younger players have had on the squad this season.

"It's a credit to the young boys who have come in and made a difference," Makrys said.

"Young boys like Troy Danaskos, who has been our left back all year, Zac Elrich and Peter Triantis too, have played every week, whilst people like David Gullo have made an impact when we've needed them to," the midfielder continued.

Sydney Olympic's troubles with Belmore Sports Ground are well documented and as a result, Olympic have hardly played there this season.

"It's definitely unsettling," Makrys said.

"Not knowing whether we're playing at home or away or where we're playing at every week is really difficult, but to put together the results that we have shows the depth of character in the squad. We've been training in public parks in the mud and it's been really tough," the midfielder continued.

Makrys paid tribute to the Greek community and particularly to the support of the newspaper, O Kosmos.

"Their coverage and level of support has been sensational," he said.

"We're all really grateful for the way that they've supported us and for the exposure they've given us, it's really beneficial to the team and the squad as a whole," Makrys said.

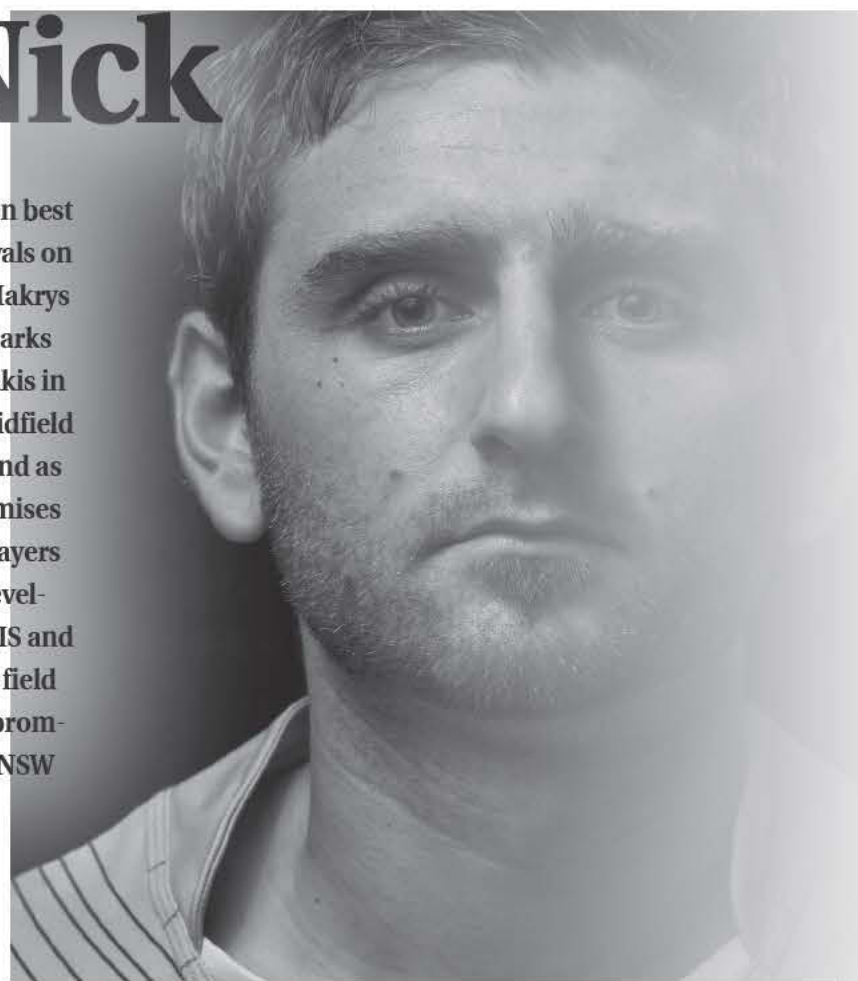
Although they are seven points in arrears of Bonnyrigg White Eagles in the race for the Premiership, Makrys exuded confidence when asked about Sydney Olympic's ambitions for the rest of the season.

"I think we'll win the competition," he said.

"Our goal was to make the top three and going in to the finals we're very confident that we can go all the way," he concluded.

With Makrys in vintage form and Sydney Olympic on a dream run, nobody would be surprised to see the club against Olympic winning back to back NSW Premier League Championships.

It's been billed as a big clash between best of mates off the pitch but fiercest rivals on it, Sydney Olympic skipper Phillip Makrys will go toe to toe with Sutherland Sharks tenacious midfielder Nick Stavroulakis in what will be a titanic battle in the midfield this Sunday at Belmore Sports Ground as both teams lock horns for what promises to be an exciting encounter. Both players came through the Olympic youth development pathway as well as the NSWIS and AIS will rekindle their battles on the field as fans will be in for a treat in what promises to be a must watch for any avid NSW Premier League fan.



NICK STAVROULAKIS WILL BE DETERMINED AS EVER

Nick Stavroulakis is still playing very good football and in many ways is determined to continue as his role at the Sutherland Sharks as Joe Russo reports.

It's a regular fixture in their line up, but that doesn't take away from his ambition to play once again at higher levels.

Our humble correspondent first had the pleasure [along with Football NSW Senior Reporter Joseph Carlucci] of interviewing Stavroulakis several years ago for our radio show. In summary, Nick Stavroulakis was a Young Soccerroo, under the tutelage of Angelos Kocoglou, and playing regularly in Empoli's under-20 team and as an occasional first or reserve for the senior team.

It's his right: Empoli in the Serie A against teams such as AC Milan, Juventus, Inter, Lazio, Roma et al. Combine that with being part of the Young Soccerroos, it seemed that Stavroulakis had the football world literally at his feet.

However, football can be a cruel game. Empoli, often regarded as one of the best teams in Italy that promotes young players, can only survive if it is able to play in the Serie A on a regular basis.

When Empoli was relegated – and it has remained in the lower two divisions ever since – the budget needed to be severely trimmed.

It went many, if not all, of the young players and many of its senior stars such as Massimo Rocchi and Antonio Di Natale, because of financial reasons. Stavroulakis found himself back home in the 'lull' period of Australian football. The old NSL had collapsed and the A-League was only starting out with eight teams; each with a limited squad of players. Simple mathematics explains the rest – not everyone was able to secure an A-League contract from the beginning. And it's here that Sutherland Sharks filled the void for him.

"It's been six years now," he said. "It's going well because Sutherland is a great club where they look after the players and the coaching staff. Whatever we need is there for us and it's a well-structured club to be at."

27 year old, who has recently been playing with a broken toe, shows the same determination that he did when playing in Italy's Serie A.

"I went to play against the Spartans and then I had a week off," he stated. "I pushed it as much as I could but then someone trod on it in the first half [against Marconi on Saturday night]. Whatever you can take, you take, but then I had to come off."

NSW Premier League and the Sutherland Sharks are very much part of his focus these days but the ambition to play once again at higher levels has never deserted the determined Stavroulakis.

"I always try as hard as I can," he said. "The coach [Robbie Stanton] always pushes me as hard as I can."

"I can do it [play at higher levels such as the A-League] then definitely. It's always in the back of my mind and it's never going to go away."

"I've got that hunger and that desire to always to push, but we'll just see what happens. I want to keep it as consistent as I can in that role that I play, that number six role. It took me a while to adjust to that role, but now I do it the best way I possibly can in this league because it is not always easy."

"I have 11 home games where we can play good football and play our normal game, but there are other grounds where you need to adjust."

Stavroulakis, who has had experience overseas, is also focussed on a career post football and hopes to one day join the player management ranks.

"I've had a night with a courier run with George Souris [Sutherland Sharks team-mate] called Next Couriers," he said. "George put me onto it but one day I would love to get into the player management side of football."

"I've had a bit of experience with agents and I want to help out at some stage in my playing career."