

OFFICIAL SYDNEY OLYMPIAKOS SUPPORTERS CLUB

SYDNEY'S OLYMPIAKOS SUPPORTERS GATHER FOR THE TRADITIONAL CUTTING OF THE VASILOPITTA

There's a roar coming from the balcony of the Greek Community Club in Lakemba. And let me assure you it's almost deafeningly loud, which makes me wonder why no one has bothered to call in the cops. As chants dedicated to the all-conquering power of the boys in red fill the air, you would be forgiven for having the misconception you have unwillingly walked into the famed Gate 7 of Athen's Karaiskaki Stadium, instead of the tranquil settings of the Greek Community Club.

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For the uninitiated, this is simply the sound of a bunch of loudmouths. Some might even go to the extreme of branding them "soccer hooligans". Which is rather unfortunate, to say the least.

Because unlike their Greek counterparts and their aptitude for unprovoked acts of violence and meticulously calculated "scare tactics", the members of the local Olympiakos fan club, aka "The Red Sharks", are nothing more than a group of boys and girls, men, women and children, all sharing the same object of affection, all eager to proclaim their undying love for the undisputed champions of Greek soccer. And let's face it: being in the stands of a soccer stadium was never designed to cater for the needs of the faint-hearted. In other words, either join the chorus, or silently veer towards a less vocal sport. Badminton, anyone?

THE RED SHARKS EVERY MOVE IS SUPPORTED BY THE GATE 7 CLUB AS WELL AS THE OFFICIAL OLYMPIAKOS. THIS SUPPORT IS EXPRESSED NOT ONLY THROUGH THE PROVISION OF THE NECESSARY MATERIAL FOR POSTER, BUT ALSO THROUGH MONETARY MEANS

With the matter of the cutting of the vasilopitta over and done with, and celebrations gearing towards their crescendo, the likes of which the Greek Community Club hasn't since Theodoris Zagorakis lifted 2004's Euro Cup high into the Portuguese sky, I managed to pull outside a few of the boys responsible for bringing together this group of Olympiakos aficionados. As customary, leading the force in this quick introduction to the crazy world of the local "Red Planet" inhabitants, is Nick Arkoudas, the club's young president.

Another year, another championship for Olympiakos. Nothing unusual there, given the team's amazing re-

cord of seven consecutive Greek championships, with the eighth one more than certain to be celebrated as this season comes to an end. While trying his best to keep a straight face, the glint in Arkoudas' eyes give the game away. "We are used to it by now" he says "but we always strive for the best". Obviously living at the other end of the world, the all-conquering pathos for all things Olympiakos, adds another dimension to the equation. "Yes, we are proud to be watching this from the other side of the word" he continues, a cheeky smile brightening his face, "but I think it was always a given: we were going to win last year's championship too".

So how did the formation of the supporters' club come about? As Arkoudas explains, most of the members of the group already knew each other from before, occasionally getting together to watch the team's progress live on satellite TV. The turning point was signaled by last year's arrival of Olympiakos in Australia. "We all called each other up and organized meetings every second week" he explains. "We learned all the chants, we rehearsed a lot with drums and trumpets, we created our own banners and working closer with the Melbourne based Olympiakos supporters we travelled there and watched our favorite team".

Although an official Olympiakos Supporters Club was in existence many a year ago, the waning interest from its members, gave the current crop of red "fanatics" to opportunity to step up and create their own group. "We have been around since last May" explains the club's secretary



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