



**Ice to Face**  
With Mark Stavroulakis

## CULINA STILL KEEN ON COACHING

Since Branko Culina's arrival in Australia almost half a century ago, he has seen just about everything in Australian football. "I came to Australia 47 years ago and I remember on my first day here going to watch (Sunshine) George Cross play Melbourne Croatia (now known as Melbourne Knights)," Culina said. "The Maltese Prime Minister was there and Olympic Park was packed with about 20,000 people. "There's always been a great interest in the sport, it's just never received the coverage that AFL does in Melbourne or NRL does here." More than just observing Australian football, Culina has helped shape it. He rode the highs and lows of state football in a playing career that spanned 16 years and took him from Victorian heavyweights St Albans Saints; which he captained at 15 years of age, to Melbourne Knights (then Essendon Croatia) as well as Sydney United 58 FC (then Sydney Croatia).

As a coach, he took his baby steps at the Saints, before moving onto the national stage as coach of the Knights in the old National Soccer League in 1992. Culina's coaching career has spanned both the NSL and A-League era with stints at Sydney FC and Newcastle Jets, but it most recently extended to the PS4 National Premier Leagues NSW Men's 1 with the Rockdale City Suns before his departure from the club earlier this season. "After six games this season it was not working out the way I wanted it to or the way they wanted," Culina said. "If it's not working, it's not comfortable, but I only have good memories from my two-and-a-half years there. "Rockdale was a great challenge for me after the A-League ... and once I made the decision

to coach again after leaving Newcastle, I wanted it to be a challenge."

Culina signed on with the Suns in 2012 - 20 years after his last stint in state league football when he won the Victorian Premier League with North Geelong Warriors. His stint at the Suns did not reap the same success, but he was able to move Rockdale from a mid-to-bottom-tier club to a regular finals contender, finishing fifth in 2014, his final full season at the club. "It was more about proving to myself that I had what it took to coach still," Culina said. "Coming from a professional environment, it's hard sometimes to work in a part-time environment and it can be frustrating ... but the achievements were good."

Since leaving, the Suns fortunes have fluctuated, but under the guidance of Paul Reid, the club is back on track for another finals campaign with three wins and a draw from its last four games. Culina admitted he has not watched a lot of Rockdale since leaving, but has kept a keen eye on the rest of the competition. "I have a lot of time for a lot of people at Rockdale, but when you've been involved in something for two-and-a-half years, and then you're not, it's a bit uncomfortable," Culina said. "But football is my life, so I've been following the competition. "I think Blacktown City is still the team to beat. They play really nice, fluid football and they have some very good players, but I don't think APIA (Leichhardt Tigers) are too far off the mark because they've got a lot of talent too." The increasing quality of play and individual talent has been the real highlight for Culina, though, who believes



NPL clubs are outstripping A-League clubs when it comes to developing senior talent. "I felt when I was in the A-League, very few people took notice of the state Premier Leagues or National Premier Leagues as they are now," Culina said. "But even I probably didn't realise how many good players are playing in this competition until I started coaching in it." There are one or two players like this in every (PS4 NPL NSW Men's 1) team, even in the bottom teams there's at least one, but there aren't enough opportunities. "You look at players like (Anthony) Golec or (Isaka) Cernak, they've played for four or five A-League clubs which is half the competition!" Some of these clubs are willing to take a risk with young, unproven coaches, but not the players. I find it extraordinary." Culina highlighted Sydney United 58's Panni Nikas, his former Suns star Marko Jasic, Blacktown City's Travis Major, Manly's Brendan Cholokian and APIA Leichhardt's Blake Powell - who has since been picked up by Wellington Phoenix - as having serious A-League potential. "I know a lot of these guys have had trials or played Olyroos in their younger days but now it's like they're 24 or 25 and no one wants to know about them," Culina said. "Why waste a squad place on a foreign player, or a player that's been recycled by half the competition when there are good, young players in good form in the state leagues worth a go and they're right under your nose." I

think that's been the big difference between the NSL and the A-League. NSL didn't have the profile and money the A-League does but the NSL produced better Socceroos. "With his time at Rockdale City Suns now over, Branko finds himself in the football wilderness, but remains keen to coach again once he returns from a family trip to Croatia to recharge the batteries. "I'd be lying if I said I didn't miss coaching and being involved."

Football has been my life since seven, be it as a player, a coach or an administrator," Branko said. "I'm not the kind of person to go door-knocking. I don't know, maybe people have forgotten about me, but I'd love to be involved at some level and I do miss the game. "I believe I still have a lot to contribute. I don't want to be one of those good soccer people that aren't involved anymore because there are plenty, which I find sad. "For instance, I read about and follow the game at all levels, not just A-League and NPL and I read that (former Socceroo coach) Raul Blanco is coaching at Sydney University. "Until that appointment, he had not been involved in football for about 10 years and that's sad because that's 10 years of his knowledge and know-how we have lost, but that club can only benefit from his appointment now. "Football has come a long way, but I think in the euphoria of the modern day game we've forgotten what the people before us have done."

## Η Μάντσεστερ Σίτι νίκησε τη Ρόμα με οδηγό τον Στέρλινγκ

Με το δεξί ξεκίνησε τις υποχρεώσεις της στο φιλικό τουρνουά ICC η Μάντσεστερ Σίτι επικρατώντας με 5-4 στα πέναλτι της Ρόμα (2-2 κανονική διάρκεια). Γκολ στο ντεμπούτο του με τους "Πολίτες" ο Ραχίμ Στέρλινγκ. Σε ένα χορταστικό ματς που κρίθηκε στα πέναλτι, η Μάντσεστερ Σίτι μπήκε με το... δεξί στο ICC. Η ομάδα του Μανουέλ Πελεγκρίνι ήρθε 2-2 με τη Ρόμα, για να επικρατήσει με 5-4 στα πέναλτι, με τον Χαρτ να πάνει τις δυο τελευταίες εκτελέσεις.

Στη ρώσικη ρουλέτα των πέναλτι κρίθηκε ο αγώνας της Μάντσεστερ Σίτι με τη Ρόμα στο πλαίσιο της 2ης αγωνιστικής του ICC που διεξήχθη στο MSG της Μελβούρνης. Η κανονική διάρκεια του αγώνα έληξε με σκορ 2-2 σε ένα ματς πλούσιο σε θέαμα, με τον γκολκίπερ των "Πολιτών", τον Χαρτ, να αποκρούει δυο πέναλτι στο τέλος και να χαρίζει τη νίκη και τους δυο βαθμούς στην

ομάδα του. Ο Ραχίμ Στέρλινγκ άνοιξε λογαριασμό με τη νέα του ομάδα μόλις στο 3', όταν εκμεταλλεύτηκε την ασίστ του Ιχεανάτσο, βγήκε απέναντι από τον Ντε Σάνκτις και άνοιξε το σκορ με ψύχραϊμο δεξί πλάσε. Η απάντηση της Ρόμα όμως ήταν άμεση και συγκεκριμένα ήρθε στο 8' με ένα απίστευτης ομορφιάς γκολ από τον Μίραλεμ Πιάνιτς, ο οποίος με δεξί "κεραυνό" έδω από την περιοχή έκανε το 1-1.

Παρά τις όποιες φάσεις έγιναν στην συνέχεια, το σκορ δεν άλλαξε ως το ημίχρονο, για να γίνει το 2-1 για τη Σίτι στο 51' με τον Ιχεανάτσο. Ο Άσλεϊ Κόουλ (είχε μπει αλλαγή στο ημίχρονο) έκανε

κακό γύρισμα προς τα πίσω, ουσιαστικά έδωσε... ασίστ στον άσο της Σίτι και εκείνος με το αριστερό έβαλε εκ νέου μπροστά στο σκορ την ομάδα του.

Ο Λιάιτς με εκτέλεση φάουλ στο 87' ισοφάρισε εκ νέου και έστειλε το ματς στα πέναλτι. Εκεί, ο Κολάροβ αστόχησε στο δεύτερο πέναλτι της Σίτι, όμως ο Χαρτ έπιασε την αλά Πανένκα εκτέλεση του Ντουμπιά στο πέμπτο και τελευταίο, ενώ μετέπειτα μάντεψε την σωστή γωνία στο πέναλτι του Κεϊτά, δίνοντας τη νίκη γοήτρου στους Άγγλους που την Παρασκευή (24/7) θα αντιμετωπίσουν τη Ρεάλ Μαδρίτης, η οποία στην προημέρα είχε χάσει 7-6 στα πέναλτι από τη Ρόμα.

