



By George Stavroulakis

Sydney United 58 ready to embark on new era under Culina

Jason Culina says he's excited to lead Sydney United 58 into a brave new era as the Reds prepare for the 2018 NPL NSW season.

There is a clean slate feeling about Edensor Park following the departure of Mark Rudan who secured a number of Waratah Cup and domestic league triumphs across his five-year rein at the club.

United 58 slumped to a seventh placed finish last season but Culina - who began his career with the Reds in 1994 - says the new challenge in front of the club should spark the best out of the playing group.

"It's a great feeling to be brought back by the club and I'm relishing the challenge, it's something different and something new", said Culina.

"In football I don't like looking too far ahead in the future but it's a great challenge not only for myself but for the club.

"It's important that we focus on improving one week at a time and seeing where that leads us."

Culina says the positive environment fostered off the field will prove key in his transition to what is the ex-midfielder's best opportunity yet to demonstrate his coaching credentials.

"Nothing will ever replace playing, but this opportunity to be back on the field and be back in the environment I've been in for so many years is fantastic, especially with such a great coaching staff and team."

Culina's Reds will need to hit the ground running early in the season especially with crunch



Jason Culina.. Sydney United

fixtures against Rockdale City Suns and Blacktown City in their first three.

The arrival of experienced A-League goalkeeper John Hall might prove to be the canniest signing of Culina's early tenure, Hall along with Tom Manos will provide a great battle for who will be the number one custodian.

Hall will be supported by the captures of promising defender Christian Gonzalez from Sydney FC and APIA Leichhardt's Adrian Vlastelica, while 24-year-old Japanese defender Tomoki Menda joins the Reds as a visa player following some eye-catching displays for Albirex Niigata in the Singaporean S. League.

Sydney Olympic starlet Mohammed Rahimi also joins United 58 alongside Jordan Roberts, one of Culina's most consistent performers with Fraser Park FC.

But the real statement signing might well prove to be Wollongong Wolves' hot shot striker Patrick Antelmi as well as former Western Sydney Wanderers star Shannon Cole.

Culina's new-look Sydney United 58 begin their campaign away at Marconi on Saturday March 10 at 7pm.

Wolves secure five more signings

The Wollongong Wolves have further strengthened their 2018 NPL NSW Men's roster by securing the services of another five players to be a part of the first-grade squad for this season.

Luke Kairies and James Markovic who both played with the Wolves in 2017 have officially recommitted for another season. Luke and James played important roles with the team last season, with James Markovic making his first-grade debut, and going on to earn a stint with the Central Coast Mariners in their National Youth League squad. Luke proved more than able back up to Justin Pasfield and having two keepers of such high standard is a must in a competition as strong as the NSW NPL Men's League

Wolves First Grade coach, Jacob Timpano

observed, "Having Luke and James back on deck for 2018 is great news for our club. They both impressed last year and I expect strong contributions from both the boys again in this campaign."

Further enhancing the Wolves prospects and adding significant depth and quality to the first-grade squad are the signings of Michael Stojanovski, Ryan Ensor and Quivi Fowler. Despite fielding a host of lucrative offers from rival clubs the trio agreed to terms with the Wolves and have been very impressive in preseason training. All are expected to travel with the team to Brisbane for the trial against Wuhan Zall FC on Saturday 10th February at Perry Park.

Timpano added, "These 5 signings pretty much complete our first



Jacob Timpano.. Wollongong Wolves coach

grade squad for 2018. I am very pleased and excited about the talent and quality we have assembled. We have a level of depth right across the park we haven't enjoyed for a long time. The boys all get on, are all training the house down and we can't wait for the season to commence."

The Wolves kick start their 2018 campaign on Sunday 11th March at WIN Stadium against Blacktown City FC. Timpano is expecting to have everyone fit and fighting for selection for

the first match of the competition.

Timpano concluded by commenting, "We have enjoyed an excellent preseason and picking the final squad for Round 1 is going to be tough. All the boys are impressing at training and while it is going to be a bit of selection headache in narrowing down our final squad, it's a good situation to be in. Our roster is pretty much done now though we do have a visa spot still up our sleeve which could prove very useful."

Sydney FC young guns ready to fire

-By Jacob Windon

Sydney FC coach Robbie Stanton says his young Sky Blues outfit are stronger and wiser from last season's fledgling year in the competition and have serious designs on going all the way when the 2018 NPL NSW season commences in a month's time.

Stanton has run last year's eleventh-placed finishers through a rigorous power and strengthening course in the off season which has unearthed a new level of confidence throughout the squad.

The Sky Blues gaffer says this development alongside the experience of playing among stronger and seasoned veterans of the game in 2017 has made Sydney one of the most competitive and hungry

teams in the competition.

"We were grateful and happy for last season, I don't think we were anywhere close to struggling technically or tactically, we were difficult to beat and certainly caused a lot of issues for other teams", he said.

"One of the areas we've improved on is the physical strength of our players, we've had them on programs that underpins their development in their power, speed and agility.

"This gives them more confidence so they feel like they can compete with men, especially for the younger ones who have stepped up to another level."

This newfound competitive edge and confidence among the youthful Sydney squad will

no doubt be chiselled further thanks a litany of exciting arrivals, particularly in Bonnyrigg pair Luke Ivanovic and Hassan Jalloh who have both been earmarked as the two of the competition's most talented young forwards.

The addition of Sutherland Sharks starlet Jeremy Cox supplies considerable stock to Sydney's firepower while Australian Institute of Sport pair Joel King and Patrick Scibillo have also been recruited into the Sky Blues squad alongside ex-Wanderers fullback Jackson Bandiera.

Key departures in the form of Christian Gonzalez, George Timotheou, Juan Zapata and Leo Malfara will provide Stanton with the chance to promote from within with the likes of Jerry Skotadis, Alex

Gollan, Ben Koop and Marco Tilio all joining the first-grade squad from Sydney's successful U18 and U20 teams.

Although the Sky Blues' primary aim is to offer a pathway into A-League football Stanton says this year's roster has the potential to go all the way in the NPL NSW.

"We're very happy with the group - we feel we've got a more complete group and been able to add some experienced players into the mix in addition to our experience gained last year.

"We're a little different as a club in that we're trying to develop players but we believe we can win against anyone we play against and win every game we play in."