



By George Stavroulakis

## Blacktown City ready to rumble

Fit, firing and out to make amends, Blacktown City coach Mark Crittenden has declared his team to be a force to be reckoned with in 2018.

The boys from Lily's Football Stadium suffered an acrimonious end to their 2017 season giving up the Premiership title to APIA Leichhardt Tigers despite holding a six point lead with five rounds to go.

It is a pain which is sure to spur City on to greater heights this season and Crittenden said it was more than evident when his squad returned to begin preseason training.

"In all my years coaching I have not seen a team turn up to start preseason in as good shape as they did this season," he said.

"2017 was the first time in four seasons in which we didn't finish the season with a trophy and that really hurt.

"The way everyone has committed themselves from the outset has given me plenty of confidence that we will be able to return the high standards we have set at this club."

Crittenden said the team had remained mostly unchanged from their 2017 squad with established stars Joey Gibbs, Mitch Mallia, Matt Lewis, Zach Cairncross and Shayne D' Cunha all returning.

One player who will not run out for Blacktown this season is last season's breakout star James Andrew who turned

down a deal to stay at the Seven Hills based club in order to join Marconi.

Three big additions to the team in 2018 will be former Sydney Olympic defender Yianni Spyrikis, French striker Charles Mendy, who joins Blacktown from Brisbane's FFA Cup surprise packets Peninsula Power and ex-Newcastle Jets star Devante Clut.

"Yianni is a good young player with good feet, great vision and an excellent passing game. He's a great guy to have in the team and I'm really excited by what he brings to the team this season," Crittenden said.

"Charles is a big athletic striker who has really impressed so far this preseason and I think he will be a difference maker for us having such a unique skill-set.

"While it was very disappointing for us to lose James Andrew, I think with the new boys we have coming in as well as the return of some key players from injury will put us in good stead to compete for silverware."

An incredible FFA Cup run, which included wins against A-League side Central Coast Mariners and ended in a dramatic penalty shoot-out loss to Western Sydney Wanderers, has spirits high in Blacktown.

With a big preseason behind them, Mark Crittenden's Blacktown side will once again be a team to watch out for

## Local Wolves stars hungry for success..

Wollongong Wolves coach Jacob Timpano hopes a strong base of South Coast locals sprinkled with a dash of star continental quality will guide the club to some much-needed silverware when the 2018 NPL NSW Men's campaign kicks off in March.

**Timpano's** Wolves finished three points shy of the top six in 2017 but is confident his charges will have the consistency to turn heads when the new season resumes.

"I was quite happy with the way we went last season, our points total usually gets you into the top six and we would have but for a couple of narrow losses," he said.

"We beat almost every team in the competition so this year we need to avoid dropping points where we shouldn't."

**The** Wolves have proven capable of matching it with

the best in recent years and Timpano says keeping hold of a consistently maturing and developing core group will be key in determining the club's fortunes on the field.

**The** real difference maker for Wollongong could prove to be the arrival of 36-year-old Japanese midfielder Takuya Nozawa, a seasoned J-League veteran who has five league titles to his name.

**Nozawa** will link up with former Kashima Antlers teammate and current Wolves forward Yuzo Tashiro and Timpano says the Japanese pair will improve Wollongong's potential to make decisive

moments in crunch matches.

"**That's** the key, these are the players that are really going to effect the game.

"**They're** going to help us achieve our goals and help us build on what we achieved last year."

**While** the addition of Nozawa is sure to whet the appetite of Wolves fans the South Coast outfit will no doubt regard the retention of A-League veteran Nick Montgomery as equally important to their finals chances in 2018.

**Montgomery** played a crucial part in Wollongong's

improvement towards the back end of last season and will prove a valuable mentor to the litany of local talent present in the Wolves roster.

**The** South Coast has traditionally been a flagship breeding ground for quality Australian footballers and Timpano cites attackers Josh Macdonald and Peter Simonovski as players to watch out for in 2018.

**Timpano** is also excited by the arrivals of former Newcastle Jets youth Ryan Ensor, Mariners prospect Michael Stojanovski and exciting attacker Quivi Fowler who recently spent time with Eredivisie outfit Vitesse.

**Wollongong** get their campaign underway by welcoming competition heavyweights Blacktown City to WIN Stadium on March 11.

## Susak turns his attention to coaching

Upon hanging up the boots, most players look to stay involved within the sport they love most. Post-football career, players take different paths.

**A** small amount stay away from the game completely, while others become directors, scouts, agents etc. Most ex-players though, take a different position on the pitch and become coaches with a vision of not only staying in the game but offering what they know to younger and up and coming stars. **After** quite an illustrious football career, Milan Susak signed with his boyhood club, the Bonnyrigg White Eagles in 2017.

**Unfortunately**, a knee injury in pre-season forced Susak to require surgery which subsequently meant his premature retirement from football.

**The** former Hyundai A-League champion was quick to put the disappointment behind

him and turn his attention to coaching.

"**It** wasn't a tough decision for me to 'hang the boots up' as the injury was enough."

**At** the end of the 2017 season, Cliff Pointer announced his own retirement, this time from coaching at the White Eagles and Brian 'Bomber' Brown's assistant.

**With** a UEFA 'C' coaching license and his extensive football experiences around the world, Susak was an obvious choice for the team from Bonnyrigg and Brown.

"**When** the Bonnyrigg White Eagles FC opportunity came knocking, it was an easy decision to make for me", said Susak.

**The** former defender will work alongside decorated

NPL NSW Men's coach Brian Brown, a prospect he cannot wait to commence.

"**It's** easy with Bomber, we have the same football thinking and training.

"**We** have a good relationship, the players are enjoying the sessions and come to training with a smile on their faces which is important."

**Susak's** football philosophy is simple but requires hard work from his players.

"**I** like a high tempo possession based game." **With** football taking him across the world, from Serbia to Germany, China, Iran and the UAE, Susak has taken a lot from various world-class coaches.

**Some** of these coaches include Zlatko Kranjcar, Hector Cuper and current Bundesliga team RB

Leipzig's head coach Ralph Hasenhüttl.

"**I've** taken bits and pieces from all the coaches I've had and there have been some big names."

**But** one that has left a specific mark on Susak's career is former Socceroos boss Ange Postecoglou, who led the defender and the Brisbane Roar to two Hyundai A-League championships.

"**Along** with his philosophy, Ange's communication and man-management of players is an important characteristic of his and something I will look to emulate in my coaching."

**The** new White Eagles assistant is patient when it comes to his coaching career but knows what he wants to do and where he wants to be.

"**I** want to go as high and far as I can but right now I'm happy to be an assistant and work my way up, along with learning from Bomber."