



By George Stavroulakis

## Sydney United 58 - Sydney FC 5-3

A Panny Nikas hat trick has handed Jason Culina his first win at Sydney United Sports Centre after defeating a spirited Sydney FC 5-3 in a hugely entertaining round four National Premier Leagues NSW encounter at Edensor Park.

The see-sawing contest was highlighted by a breathless ten minute period in the opening half that saw Jeremy Cox give the Sky Blues the lead on two occasions before United 58 fought back to restore parity twice and eventually edged in front before half time courtesy of a Chris Payne effort and a pair of Nikas strikes.

Patrick Antelmi gave the home side breathing space early in the second half before Nikas all but sealed back to back victories for United 58 and claimed his treble with an audaciously struck penalty with fifteen minutes remaining. Jerry Skotadis netted a fine stoppage time consolation for the Young Sky Blues, who despite their third match defeat in a row, will be buoyed after contesting toe to toe against a vastly more experienced United 58 unit with five former A-League stalwarts peppered throughout the team.

Robbie Stanton's side shocked the home crowd after taking a fourth-minute lead when Cox won and coolly dispatched a penalty following a foul from experienced defender Peter Markovic.

The Reds were flustered but Nikas drew his side level fifteen minutes later after the United 58 skipper unleashed a superb left-footed effort from distance past Sydney goalkeeper Duro Dragicevic. It was his first for the 2018 season and a signal that the stand-in skipper was back in business.

Sydney were then back in front in less than sixty-seconds when Cox powered an unerring finish past Thomas Manos after a lovely exchange with Luke Ivanovic for his fifth goal of the season.

But the visitors' lead quickly evaporated again when Payne slammed home unmarked at the back post after being set up by Matt Sim, before Nikas fired his second of the evening low past Dragicevic to give the Reds the advantage at half time.

The Reds opened the second half with a flurry of chances to Nikas and Sim before eventually doubling their lead through Antelmi who bundled home his second of the campaign after a scrappy contest in the box.

Culina's men had rode their luck on occasion but underlined their dominance when Nikas sealed his treble with a textbook panenka from the spot after Sim was tripped by Sydney defender Liam Mcging.

The one worry for United 58 will be in the concession of three goals with Skotadis supplying a fine consolation goal in injury time for the visitors.

Culina made it clear after the contest that his charges will need to rectify their propensity to drop focus in order to sustain a title challenge this campaign.

"In the end I was happy, we probably made



### 1st - NPL NSW Men's Results

Sutherland Sharks - Wollongong Wolves 3-0 (2-0)

Bonnyrigg WE - Rockdale City Suns 3-4 (3-0)

Marconi Stallions - Manly United 2-4 (2-2)

Sydney United - Sydney FC Youth 5-3 (3-2)

Sydney Olympic - Hakoah Sydney 2-1 (1-0)

APIA Tigers - Blacktown City 0-2 (0-0)

it more difficult for ourselves especially when you give away a penalty in the fourth minute and give away a goal straight after you've equalized – you start to make things difficult for yourself," he said.

"It's all about focus – the last thing you say when you walk out of the changing rooms is make sure you're focused in the first fifteen minutes and get on top of the opposition and in the first four rounds we haven't done that and something we need to fix.

"At the moment we have to score more goals because we're conceding too many – that's five in two games now and on that side of things we most definitely need improvement."

Although Robbie Stanton could only watch on as his side surrendered to their third straight defeat the Sky Blues boss was hugely proud of his players and once again attributed the loss to inexperience in crucial moments.

"I thought we were really good, we had a good look at them during the week and caught them in a few nice early moments but again were caught by inexperience and by players who will hurt you if you give them too much room," he said.

"We've watched Sydney United three times and they worked a hell of a lot harder tonight than they had in previous games so I look at that and say well they knew they had to work harder.

"I have no complaints, I'm really proud of the players and we have to learn these lessons."

Sydney United 58 5 (Nikas 21', 32', 75', Payne

30', Antelmi 56') Sydney FC 3 (Cox 4', 23', Skotadis 92')

Sydney United 58: 9. Patrick Antelmi (13. Sam Perre 78'), 12. Shannon Cole (2. Cristian Gonzalez 20'), 21. Thomas Manos, 20. Peter Markovic, 15. Tomoki Menda, 23. Panagiotis Nikas, 6. Christopher Payne, 11. Yianni Perkatis, 8. Matthew Sim, 5. Anthony Tomelic, 4. Adrian Vlastelica (3. Jordan Roberts 87')

Substitutes not used: 1. John Hall,

7. Mohammad Rahimi

Yellow cards: Vlastelica 61'

Sydney FC: 6. Andreas Agamemnonos, 15. Jeremy Cox, 2. Brendan Curtis, 30. Duro Dragicevic, 11. Luke Ivanovic (22. Harry Van Der Saag 90'), 9. Hassan Halloh (24. Daniel Blachura 89'), 14. Joel King, 4. Liam Mcging, 8. Sam Mcillhatton, 5. Patrick Scibilio, 7. Jerry Skotadis

Substitutes not used: 12. Jackson Bandiera,



1. Mitchell Evans, 21. Finn Ballard-Mcbride

Yellow cards: N/A

Player Ratings

3 – Nikas (UTD 58)

2 – Cox (SYD)

1 – Sim (UTD 58)

### 1st - NPL NSW Men's Current Ladder

	Team	GP	Pts	W	D	L	GF	GA	+/-
1	Blacktown City	4	10	3	1	0	7	0	7
2	Sydney Olympic	4	9	3	0	1	6	5	1
3	Sutherland Sharks	4	7	2	1	1	7	4	3
4	Wollongong Wolves	4	7	2	1	1	3	4	-1
5	Sydney United	4	6	2	0	2	8	7	1
6	APIA Tigers	3	6	2	0	1	4	3	1
7	Rockdale City Suns	4	6	2	0	2	7	7	0
8	Hakoah Sydney	4	4	1	1	2	7	7	0
9	Marconi Stallions	3	4	1	1	1	4	5	-1
10	Sydney FC Youth	4	3	1	0	3	8	10	-2
11	Manly United	4	3	1	0	3	6	9	-3
12	Bonnyrigg WE	4	1	0	1	3	5	11	-6