

Sutherland Sharks - Sydney United 58 0-3

The match was riddled with audacious shots, brilliant goalkeeping, tricks, flicks, and a spot of controversy in what was a highly entertaining affair for the healthy crowd of spectators in attendance.

Fullback Jordan Roberts opened the scoring for the visitors late in the first half before a Chris Payne spot kick and yet another goal from the in-form Pani Nikas put the game beyond doubt in the second half.

The triumph was United's third in a single week with their midweek FFA Cup win sandwiched in between last weekend's victory over the Young Sky Blues and tonight's clash.

Jason Culina's well-drilled side got the job done once again on the night while Grant Lee's boys can hold their heads high after well and truly keeping themselves in the match before a late capitulation put the match beyond their reach.

Jacob Tratt is proving to be a quality off-season signing following his move to the Sutherland Shire, and the defender went close for the hosts in the opening minutes with a free kick that flashed just past Thomas Manos' near post.

United created their first chance of the match soon after from a corner as the experienced Peter Markovic knocked the ball down for his central defensive partner Adrian Vlastelica. A typical defender's finish was produced as the half-chance was rocketed well over the crossbar.

Nick Olsen looked lively against his former employers having recently returned to the Sharks following a stint at United. His direct running and chance creation could well have led to an opening goal had Adrian Vranic found a way past Manos.

The United keeper was on top of his game tonight and having none of it, bravely smothering Vranic's tame finish before confidently saving a spectacular scissor kick from Leroy Jennings moments later.

Nikas has returned to haunt his former club on multiple occasions since his 2015 move from the Shire to United and would eventually do so once again tonight. The mercurial playmaker's combination of vision, tricks, and flicks continually kept Sutherland on their toes.

He was left with his head in his hands on a couple of occasions during the opening period; firstly due to a glaring miss near the half hour mark and once again when Ryan Norval produced a brilliant diving save to deny his curled free kick from the edge of the box.

As the half wore on Manos reacted sharply to tip away Joshua Da Silva's powerful shot before Tratt's brilliant last ditch tackle denied Patrick Antelmi a golden opportunity at

the other end.

Having defended so stoically throughout the half the hosts will be left disappointed at how they eventually conceded shortly before the interval.

A defensive foul from Blair Brown led to a monetary lapse in concentration which was duly punished. A quickly taken free kick was fed to Nikas who then poked the ball through for an unmarked Roberts to charge into the box and open the scoring with a calmly placed finish.

Despite the error Sutherland's heads did not drop. Once play resumed for the second half they swept forward in numbers in search of a goal while United looked to maintain their shape, absorb the increasing pressure, and patiently wait for opportunities to strike on the break.

A sickening clash of heads between Markovic and Tratt after the hour mark saw a lengthy delay for treatment before the latter replaced by Nick Littler having temporarily lost consciousness.

The host's best chance of an equaliser came to Lachlan Everett following a brilliant pass from Olsen, yet his volley deflected wide after expertly controlling the ball on his chest.

Moments later at the other end Da Silva was adjudged to have fouled Nikas in the box and a penalty was awarded by Kris Griffith-Jones despite Sutherland's adamant protests. Payne stepped up to coolly slot the ball beyond Norval and double United's lead.

The quality of the match somewhat declined from that as the home players looked to take matters into their own hands.

The Sharks soon had a penalty shout of their own waved away, creating yet another lapse in concentration of which United took advantage in devastating fashion.

The following counterattack culminated in Nikas putting the nail in the coffin of his former club with a third goal, putting the game beyond doubt.

The match fizzled out from that point as United saw out the game before heading home with yet another three points in the bag.

Sydney United 58 coach Jason Culina was very happy to wrap up a challenging week of football with three wins from three.

"I'm very happy," smiled Culina. **"Considering we** had a midweek game in FFA Cup I thought the boys backed up really well. It's never easy playing three games in



a week and we had a good test against Sydney FC last weekend, then midweek and tonight.

"Sutherland are a very physical team, quick, young, enthusiastic, and they made it difficult for us, especially early on.

"I asked the boys before the game to dig in when the going gets tough and that's exactly what they did today.

"It was a great attitude from the boys, it's our third win on the trot, and it's all about momentum now. As long as we continue playing the way that we are and playing with the same intensity then I can look forward to next weekend's game."

Having patiently waited for their opening goal Culina was happy to see his side adjust to counter their opponent's attacking reaction before picking their moment to put the game to bed.

"That's what we've been all about from day one," explained Culina. **"We've always** said that we want to have good shape and be organised and difficult to beat.

"The boys are getting better and better each week, all understanding their roles which is important and even the guys that come off the bench know how important it is to understand their roles.

"We're a good team, we believe in what we're doing, and if we continue we can do some good things and produce some good football so we'll just continue believing in ourselves and see where it takes us."

Despite the result Sutherland Sharks coach Grant Lee drew many positives from the match that perhaps could have ended differently had a little luck fallen their way.

"It was a good game of football," said Lee.

"The first half was a real arm wrestle, it was a real battle.

"We switched off for the goal with the quick free kick three minutes before half time which was a killer.

"When you play against quality players they'll do that to you. Credit to them they played it and moved it and we didn't adjust quick enough.

"It's a little bit naive, we talked about it, but it just comes down to experience and it's a shame because we deserved to go in 0-0 at half time after a real wrestle.

"I was really happy with the way the boys responded. I thought the second half for thirty minutes it was really good quality play."

"We took it right to them, were on top of them and battering them. It was just a matter of time before it was going to come but then we had a moment that kills the game."

Match Stats

Sutherland Sharks 0

Sydney United 58 3 (Jordan Roberts 43', Chris Payne 74', Pani Nikas 77')

Saturday 7th April, 2018

Seymour Shaw, Miranda

Referee: K. Griffith-Jones

Assistants: E. Kocbek & S. Quinn

4th Official: F. Bolognini

Sutherland Sharks: 1. Ryan Norval;

2. Jacob Tratt (15. Nick Littler 66'),

6. Lachlan Everett, 9. Adrian Vranic,

10. Joshua Da Silva, 11. Hristijan

Tanoski, 12. Blair Brown, 13. Robert

Watson, 17. Leroy Jennings (16.

Ryoga Suyama 90+1'), 20. Keisuke

Hayashi, 22. Nick Olsen

Substitutes not used: 5. Bradley

Bartels, 21. Nikolas Loe

Yellow Cards: Joshua Da Silva 16'

Red Cards: nil

Sydney United 58: 21. Thomas

Manos; 2. Cristian Gonzalez, 3.

Jordan Roberts, 4. Adrian Vlastelica,

5. Anthony Tomelic (18. Glen Trifiro

75'), 6. Christopher Payne, 8.

Matthew Sim (17. Mathew Bilic

79'), 9. Patrick Antelmi (13. Sam

Perre 89'), 11. Yianni Perkatis, 20.

Peter Markovic, 23. Panagiotis Nikas

Substitutes not used: 1. Jacob

Chapman, 7. Naim Rahimi

Yellow Cards: Anthony Tomelic

63'

Red Cards: nil

Player Ratings

3 – Pani Nikas (SU58)

2 – Thomas Manos (SU58)

1 – Nick Olsen (SS)