



By George Stavroulakis



A-League grand final: Melbourne Victory beat Newcastle Jets 1-0 to win fourth championship

Melbourne Victory have broken the hearts of the Jets and their legion of fans by claiming the A-League championship with a 1-0 win in the grand final in Newcastle.

A contentious ninth-minute goal to Kosta Barbarouses - the quickest in an A-League grand final - in front of a boisterous crowd of 29,410 was enough for the Victory to deny the Jets following their fairytale run to the season decider.

The grand final triumph gave the Victory their fourth championship, moving them in front of Sydney FC as the most successful club in A-League history.

The Jets rode the wave of support from those crammed into their home ground in Newcastle, as they attempted to become the first Australian side in any sporting code to go from wooden spooners to champions in one season.

In the end, it was Ernie Merrick's one-time protege turned combatant Kevin Muscat who got the last laugh in a contest that started breathlessly but was shut down by Victory's experienced campaigners.

The Victory silenced the Newcastle faithful early in the first half when Barbarouses scored in

controversial circumstances.

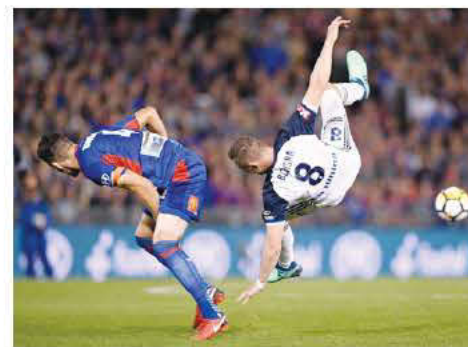
Leroy George had sent in a free kick, which was headed down by Jamie Donachie amid congestion at the far post into the direction of Barbarouses.

Barbarouses made no mistake with his left-foot strike, although the VAR will come under scrutiny once again as replays suggested Donachie and two of his teammates were offside in the lead-up to the goal.

It was a letdown for the Jets but it did not show, as they were soon on attack down the opposite end of the field.

Roy O'Donovan came close to an equaliser in the 16th minute but excellent goalkeeping from Lawrence Thomas, who deservedly claimed the Joe Marston Medal as player of the match, kept the Jets at bay.

It was not the only occasion Thomas was called into play, with the Victory keeper showing cool nerves when he brilliantly saved a strike from Riley McGree before quickly getting back to his feet to fend away the follow-up effort from Jason Hoffman.



Besart Berisha (R) heads towards the turf after being tackled by Nigel Boogaard.

The Jets' chances on goal came as they enjoyed a mammoth 66 per cent of possession in the first half, contrasting the Victory who had made the most of their limited chances.

George had proven to be a menace for the visitors down the left flank during the opening term, with the Dutchman drawing a superb save from the Jets' Glen Moss when he threatened close to the penalty area.

The second half saw the Victory enjoy the better of the attacking opportunities, but neither side able to find the back of the net.

The Jets faded after the break as their early momentum fell victim to a staunch Victory defence run by Thomas Deng and James Donachie.

The Victory utilised their big-stage experience to close down the match, as James Troisi and Terry Antonis began to properly assert themselves.

The latter was momentarily felled during an aerial clash with ex-Victory man Daniel Georgievski.

But it was O'Donovan who really came off worse for wear when he threw himself in the path of Besart Berisha to stop the ball rolling over the goal line and copped a stray elbow the face.

The match ended on a sour note when O'Donovan was handed a red card during the period of stoppage time.

Dimitri Petratos had fired in a free kick when O'Donovan's right boot hit the advancing Thomas in the head studs up, with referee Jarred Gillett showing no hesitation in sending the Jet from the field.

The Jets had been hoping to win their second A-League championship 10 years after their maiden title.

AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019

The Caltex Socceroos will discover their group stage opponents for the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019™ early on Saturday morning (AEST) when the official draw for Asia's top international football tournament takes place in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Australia, who will be represented at the official draw by Head of National Teams, Luke Casserly, as well as Caltex Socceroos Assistant Coach, Ante Milicic, has been placed in Pot 1 for the 24-nation draw alongside hosts UAE, IR Iran, Japan, Korea Republic, and Saudi Arabia.

The Caltex Socceroos, who will be seeking to defend their AFC Asian Cup crown in the UAE early in 2019, will be pooled alongside three nations – one each from Pots 2, 3, and 4. As the second-highest FIFA ranked nation at the tournament, Australia will avoid all other Pot 1 nations until the knockout phase of the competition.

The official draw for the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019™ will

be held at the iconic Burj Khalifa, a stunning building recognised as the world's tallest skyscraper, at 7.30pm local time on Friday (1.30am AEST – Saturday, 5 May 2018).

The official draw for the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019™ will be streamed live via the Asian Football Confederation's (AFC) official Facebook page – www.facebook.com/theafcasiacup.

2019 will mark the first time that 24 nations have competed at the AFC Asian Cup Finals, after 16 teams took part in the last four versions of the competition. The Caltex Socceroos won the AFC Asian Cup on home soil in 2015 after beating Korea Republic in a thrilling Final in Sydney, and were beaten in the Final by Japan in 2011 in Doha, Qatar.

Eight venues in four cities (Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, and Al Ain) will host matches at the AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019™.

The tournament will kick-off in Abu Dhabi on 5 January 2019, and conclude in the same city on 1 February 2019.

AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019™ - Final Draw:

When: Friday, 4 May 2018 (local time)

Where: Armani Hotel, Burj Khalifa, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Time: 7.30pm (local time); 1.30am AEST – Saturday, 5 May 2018

Broadcast: www.facebook.com/theafcasiacup

Social Media: Join the official draw conversation using #AsianCup2019

AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019™ - Final Draw Pots:

Pot 1: United Arab Emirates, IR Iran, Australia, Japan, Korea Republic, Saudi

Arabia

Pot 2: China PR, Syria, Uzbekistan, Iraq, Qatar, Thailand

Pot 3: Kyrgyz Republic, Lebanon, Palestine, Oman, India, Vietnam

Pot 4: DPR Korea, Philippines, Bahrain, Jordan, Yemen, Turkmenistan

