



By George Stavroulakis

Mallia discusses mentality and Malta

Finals football is the natural target of most teams, yet few reach this objective with such regularity as the ever-present Blacktown City FC.

Blacktown City's captain and attacking spark Mitchell Mallia has been a central figure in their recent success since signing for the club from Sydney FC in 2014.

The 26-year-old, who on Sunday netted a clinical hat-trick in their 5-3 win over Rockdale City Suns, credits his side's consistency to the winning mentality drilled into the squad over the years by their affable coach Mark Crittenden, and his trusted number 2, club legend Luke Roodenburg.

"We've had some great success over the last four or five years," said Mallia.

"We've won most trophies that were up for grabs, aside from the FFA Cup, which is a great achievement for the club.

"It's a very good club and as you can see by the results we've earned.

"There's no coincidence that Critto (Crittenden) and Roodenburg have been there to instill that consistency.

"There's a very big winning culture at Blacktown; whether we're playing foosball (Table Football) before training or we're in training, we have to win everything, no matter what.

"The coach has that effect on the players, breeding that winning environment, which I think is a big reason why we've been so successful over recent years."

The 2018 NPL NSW Men's competition is perhaps the most challenging installment yet, with teams struggling to create the rhythm needed to emerge from the ladder's clustered centre.

Thanks to recent back-to-back victories, Blacktown City are one of few teams to navigate their way out of the traffic, finding themselves third and hot on the heels of the top two.

"On any day any team can beat anyone," said Mallia.

"It's been that type of year, but we've managed to stay in the top half of the table, which is good.



"It's a very tough league this year and every team is in with a chance, so we have to take every game as if it was going to be our last.

"We don't take any games lightly and I think that's helped take us to the top end of the table.

"It's still early, there's plenty more games to go, and we'll be hoping to move toward the top spot by the end of the season."

Mallia's performances hardly go unnoticed, serving him well domestically in earning a 2017 loan stint with Perth Glory, and internationally in receiving a call-up to the Maltese national team in March.

Joining the Maltese camp for international friendlies against Luxembourg and Finland, Mallia was unfortunately prevented from taking the field as Malta still await FIFA clearance to play the Liverpool-born attacker who previously represented Australia at U17 and U23 levels.

Mallia hopes for the technicalities to be sorted in time to participate in the inaugural UEFA Nations League, which pits

Malta against Azerbaijan, Faroe Islands, and Kosovo in Group 3 of League D.

"It was a great experience to be involved in the national team set up," Mallia reminisced.

"It was a bit disappointing on a personal level because I wasn't actually cleared to play.

"The whole week I was training in the starting line-up, dealing with set pieces, and receiving instructions on what they wanted me to do.

"Right before kick-off the coach tells me that I haven't actually been cleared by FIFA to play, which was upsetting, but I'm still grateful for the experience nonetheless and hopefully another opportunity comes along down the track.

"For now, FIFA will be too busy with the World Cup and probably have bigger things to worry about than a local kid from Western Sydney.

"They (Malta) have friendlies in a few weeks, but later in the year is the UEFA Nations League, so that would be a dream to be a part of, but we'll worry about that then."

Next up on the domestic front Mallia faces his former employers, Sydney FC, where he first excelled in the National Youth League before breaking into Vitezslav Lavicka's senior A-League squad.

There'll be no bittersweet feelings for Mallia come Saturday's kick-off, with the squad having evolved drastically at senior and junior levels since his departure.

"It's a bit weird because there's pretty much no one at Sydney FC from when I was there," remarked Mallia.

"There's no homecoming or anything like that for me, I'll just take it as another game.

"Sydney are a young side, they're well coached, they play great football.



Friday, 11th of May, Football NSW will release round 6 of the FFA Cup draw at 11am via the official FNSW Facebook page, don't forget to tune in! #MagicOfTheCup






FFA CUP ROUND 6 DRAW
to be released on
Friday 11th May @ 11am
on Football NSW's Facebook page

Tarek Elrich returns to Western Sydney

The NRMA Insurance Western Sydney Wanderers are proud to announce the return of defender Tarek Elrich on a two-year deal.

Elrich, a Western Sydney local who played junior football with Parramatta Eagles, was one of the Wanderers' three inaugural signings on 25 June 2012. **The fullback** made 11 appearances in his one season with the club, helping the Red & Black in their record-breaking run to the Premiers Plate and Grand Final. **Capped three-times** by the Socceroos, the fullback

returns to the club after a successful five seasons with Adelaide United, where he made 112 Hyundai A-League appearances for the Reds, winning the Premiership, Championship and FFA Cup. **The 31-year-old** said he was delighted to be coming home to Western Sydney. **"Both myself** and my family are over the moon. I'm glad to be back where

it all started for me," Elrich said. **Having missed** most of last season with a knee injury, Elrich said he's more hungry than ever. **"I'm going** to work as hard as I can to cement my spot in the team. **"I've been** playing and training for a few months and it's felt great and I've missed the game a lot so I'm actually really looking forward to putting on the

boots again and playing in front of my friends and **On returning** to the club, Elrich said he's fully focused on achieving more success at the Wanderers. **"There's one** thing that's always haunted me and that's not winning that Grand Final. It's something that's always played in the back of my mind," he continued. **"I've been** lucky enough to win something at every

club I played with but there was that one trophy that I wanted here. **"I hope** that I can bring that experience and what I achieved at Adelaide here at the Wanderers." **Tarek Elrich**
Age: 31 (01/01/87)
Height: 180cm
Weight: 77kg
Born: Western Sydney
Junior club: Parramatta Eagles

