



By George Stavroulakis

NPL 1 NSW Men's 2018 Round 21 Preview

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It's shaping up to be a thrilling end to the National Premier Leagues NSW season and this weekend's penultimate round of fixtures will have a big say in who takes out the Premiership. APIA Leichhardt Tigers hold top spot on the ladder but only by points difference ahead of Sydney Olympic. The Tigers host relegation battling Bonnyrigg White Eagles on Sunday while Olympic have an arduous road trip down to the South Coast to take on Wollongong Wolves. With so much riding on the results of these matches, they will be must watch encounters for fans of both clubs. In the other Round 21 action, Rockdale travel to Hensley Athletic Field on Sunday to play Hakoah Sydney East with a win needed to secure their spot in the finals. The chasing pack of Manly United and Marconi Stallions both hold on to slim hopes of leapfrogging Rockdale into the final playoff spot and will need nothing less than three points when they take on Sydney United 58 and Sutherland Sharks respectively on Saturday night. Finally bottom side Sydney FC will hope to end the season on a high note when they host fourth placed Blacktown City at Lambert Park.

#Sutherland Sharks v Marconi Stallions FC, 6.30pm Saturday at Seymour Shaw

While they may have had their own playoffs hopes crushed, Sutherland Sharks will look to do the same to the visiting Marconi Stallions at Seymour Shaw this Saturday night.

A tough run of results over the second half of the season, including a 3-1 defeat last week to Sydney Olympic, has all but ended the Sharks chances of playing in the post season.

Their opponent this week, Marconi, needs to win the remaining two games on the schedule to usurp Rockdale from fifth spot. A 4-1 win against Sydney FC certainly helped the Stallions case.

Marconi is three points behind Rockdale in sixth position on 27 points.

Sutherland struggled against Olympic's high powered attack and Marconi is sure to take note of that in their gameplay.

Look for lots of Marko Jasic, Hassan Jollah, Charles Mendy and Sean Rooney as the visitors set out to attack the Sharks into submission.

To make matters worse, Sutherland will be without defensive leader Jacob Tratt for the match forcing everyone else to take their game to another level.

Marconi has everything to play for and the motivation of finals football will make them desperate to take the most out of this match.

It is a scary proposition for Sutherland who are in for an almighty clash.

#Sydney United 58 FC v Manly United FC, 7.30pm Saturday at Sydney United Sports Centre

Sydney United 58 will be desperate to bounce back from last week's thrashing at the hands of APIA Leichhardt Tigers when they host Manly United on Saturday.

United 58 shipped six goals, including four in the first half, as APIA cruised to a 6-2 victory.

Manly come into the game after snatching a late 1-1 draw against Wollongong Wolves.

The loss to APIA was The Red's first in six weeks and would've come as a shock to coach Miro Vlastelica who has had his side firing on all cylinders since his mid-season appointment. **Chris Payne** has been back to his goal scoring best in the latter half of the campaign and



will be a dangerous customer for the Manly defence.

Manly may have won the Championship last season but they have failed to hit anywhere near those heights in 2018.

Despite this they are still a long shot of sneaking into the finals but anything less than a win this week would end their chances.

There is a lot riding on this game for the boys from the Northern Beaches so expect them to leave no stone unturned in their pursuit of victory.

#Sydney FC v Blacktown City FC, 7.45pm Saturday at Lambert Park

Sydney FC will be hoping for a positive end to a tough season with an upset win against Blacktown City on Saturday.

The Young Sky Blues remain rooted to the bottom of the ladder and a 4-1 defeat away to Marconi last week was just another heartbreaking result for Robbie Stanton's

rising stars.

Blacktown has been well below their best this season but are all but certain to make the finals. They were lucky last round as a young star of their own in Mason Versi rescued them with a late goal to salvage a 1-1 draw against Rockdale.

Sydney will be playing for pride in this game and a win against a big scalp like Blacktown would do wonders for their confidence.

Goalkeeper Duro Dragicevic has seen a fair few balls sail into the back of his net this campaign yet has still been one of Sydney FC's brightest performers with incredible saves to keep his side in many matches.

Joey Gibbs failed to hit the net last match but is always a good bet to score for Blacktown. He will be fired up to take the game to Sydney's young defence.

Blacktown will be the favourites for this match but this season has proven anything can happen in 90 minutes.

#Hakoah Sydney City East FC v Rockdale City Suns FC, 3pm Sunday at Hensley Athletic Field

Hakoah Sydney City East will be out for back to back wins when they host Rockdale City Suns on Sunday.

A dominant 3-0 win against Bonnyrigg White Eagles last week was a return to winning ways for Gavin Rae's Hakoah side after a run of heartbreaking defeats.

Rockdale were forced to share the spoils in their match after conceding a late equaliser in a 1-1 draw with Blacktown City.

It has been a difficult second half of the season for Hakoah with the side unable to capitalise on their impressive start to the campaign. Finals football is out of the question for the Eastern Suburbs side and as a result motivation could be hard to find over the final two games of the campaign.

They will be without star player Andre De Jong who has gone on to earn a trial with A-League side Wellington Phoenix after making his debut for the New Zealand national team earlier this season.

Rockdale are currently holding onto fifth position on the ladder and the final ticket to the playoffs. A win against Hakoah could secure their spot in the postseason.

Rockdale have all to play for and will be favourites for this clash.

#Wollongong Wolves v Sydney Olympic FC, 3pm Sunday at Hooka Creek Park

Wollongong Wolves have the chance to help decide the Premiership title when they take on Sydney Olympic this Sunday.

Second placed Olympic need to win to keep their hopes alive and defeat could all but wreck their chances of lifting the Premiership on August 10.

Wollongong are mathematically still in the fight for the finals but need an absolute miracle to extend their season into the playoffs.

They come into the game after a 1-1 draw with Manly United last round.

