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By George Stavroulakis

NPL NSW MEN'S 1 2018 PLAY OFFS

APIA Leichhardt Tigers FC - Sydney United 58 FC 1-1 (3-5)

Sydney United 58 In Finals Penalty Shootout

An inspired display from Thomas Manos has helped a 10-man Sydney United 58 take out a controversial win against APIA Leichhardt after a 5-3 penalty shoot-out victory at Lambert Park on Saturday.

With the game locked at 1-1 after 90 minutes, Manos wrapped up his man of the match performance by making a save in the shoot-out to give United 58 a shock win and move them to only one game away from a grand final berth.

It was a game full of twists and turns as well as a moment of madness which is sure to be talked about for weeks to come.

Patrick Antelmi gave the visitors the lead on the cusp of halftime but he shouldn't have even been on the field after escaping punishment for lashing out off the ball with Chris Payne was sent off instead in a case of mistaken identity.

Manos was playing like a man possessed making save after save as the Tigers looked to take advantage of their man advantage with relentless waves of attack.

It took APIA until the final moments of the match to find an equaliser when Nathan Millgate sent the home support into pure jubilation with a clutch goal at the death.

But Manos, and United 58, would have the final laugh as to hand APIA their second defeat in as many weeks.

United 58 had the better of possession to start the match and pressed high into APIA's half.

It proved to be an effective tactic with APIA struggling to connect passes and move the ball out of defence.

An acrobatic save from Ivan Necevski saved APIA from going down to an early lead when he denied a brilliant curling free-kick from Matt Sim in the 10th minute.

The home side had a great chance 20 minutes in when United 58 keeper Thomas Manos made a lunging effort to punch the ball clear only centimetres before it reached the head of Sekiya.

APIA were slowly finding their rhythm and in the 24th minute missed a gilt-edged chance to take the lead.

Defender Nathan Millgate broke through the United 58 defence after receiving a flick on but fired way wide despite being one-on-one with the keeper and only six yards from goal.

The Tigers were denied by Manos again in the 26th minute, this time the shot stopper



was at full stretch to flick a deft chip from Howard fondly over the bar.

In the 32nd minute it was Yianni Perkatis who came to the rescue for the visitors clearing off the line after Manos slipped as he raced out to save the ball.

The match fell into total chaos in the 39th minute after an elbow from United 58's Patrick Antelmi on APIA defender Paul Galimi in back play.

However, it was a case of mistaken identity with striker Chris Payne given a straight red card which infuriated the traveling United 58 support and their coaching staff.

A red card soon followed for The Red's assistant coach with referee Adrian Arndt not taking kindly to his protests.

With the game headed to half time seemingly locked at 0-0, the match served up an incredible twist.

Antelmi broke free of his marker to tap past the keeper and give the visitors a 1-0 lead after 45 minutes.

It was a crazy end to the opening stanza which silenced APIA's fans but had the United 58 faithful in raptures.

APIA raced out of the blocks in the second stanza but desperate defending from 10-man United 58 stifled their efforts.

Manos was having the game of his life and denied a breakaway effort from Sekiya in the 62nd minute.

The shot stopper made another key save after 75 minutes when he denied Howard Fondyke's long range effort.

The game was getting away from APIA as they threw players forward in a desperate attempt to find an equaliser.

United 58 were clinging on and with the game ticking into added time they were starting to feel as if they had done enough.

However, the game had another twist to come and this time it was APIA as defender Millgate fired home for a dramatic equaliser after a scrap in the box sending the game to extra time.

It was all APIA after the resumption of play as the home side sent wave after wave of attack in search of the match winner.

Sekiya fired wide after rounding the keeper 95 minutes in before Fondyke fired wide four minutes later.

Despite everything APIA could throw at goal, Manos had it covered.

Two more clutch saves in the dying stages of extra-time ensured the game would be decided from the penalty spot.

Both sides scored their first two penalties before Manos became the saviour to block a penalty from David D'Apuzzo which went low and up the middle.

The visitors scored their next two penalties to complete the victory and stun APIA on their home turf.

Sydney United 58 coach Miro Vlastelica was left speechless after the full time whistle.

"What can you say about that game. It was a wild ride and the way the boys dug in to get the win was absolutely incredible," he said.

"When everything was against us they found another level.

"I'm so proud of them. It was an emotional game and it could be just the result we needed to lift us through the finals."

A sombre Billy McColl stressed the defeat would not cause his side to give up.

"It was a crazy game and the boys fought really hard but at the end of the day that's football, he said.

"We will keep our heads high and fight on another day."