



By George Stavroulakis

FFA Cup: APIA Leichhardt deliver a big shock, scoring late to eliminate Melbourne Victory 3-2

FRANCO PARISI.. AGE 35 YEARS LEGEND

APIA Leichhardt veteran Franco Parisi says most of the boys in his squad could play in the A-League.

APIA stunned reigning A-League champions Melbourne Victory 3-2 at Leichhardt Oval on Tuesday night in the FFA Cup Round of 16.

Victory found themselves two goals down, but made it 2-2 courtesy of a Kenny Athiu brace, however Nathan Millgate won the game for APIA in the 80th minute.

Tasuku Sekiya was the hero for the Tigers with his two goals and Parisi said he was capable of playing A-League.

Parisi was an NSL player with Sydney Olympic and Sydney United and has played for APIA in the NPL for the last 11 years.

"For me it's nothing personal, it's about the team I'm playing with now," Parisi told FourFourTwo.

"It's about getting these boys to a level where they need to be. I've been there and done that, so it's not about me.

"We definitely weren't intimidated by Victory and I think there's a few boys in our group that could easily step up to the A-League.

"For us, the confidence is there and games like Tuesday will help us commit as a leading



club in New South Wales and hopefully some of our boys might be in contention for the A-League.

"I could list all of our players. You just need to watch the game on Tuesday and to see we scored two goals.

"Sean Symons dominates on the left-wing, Adrian Uchino picked up on everything. Davey D'Apuzzo on the right and Corey Biczo before that.

"Every player deserved their place and wouldn't step out of place if we were to play another A-League team."

APIA were coming off a loss to Sydney United on penalties in the first week of NPL finals and Parisi said the game helped them cope against Victory.

"Adrenaline gets you through and we got an early goal and we ran with that," he said.

"We're disciplined and we always knew we could score goals, but it was a matter of 'can we hold them out?' because they're a super team.

"Most of us worked during the day, but we've all got reasonable bosses and we all left early afternoon. Everyone was there by 5.30 ready and committed.

"There's definitely a gap between NPL and A-League from a professional point of view, but there's many great footballers from the NPL that could easily adapt and Tuesday shows that.

"We are aware A-League are in pre-season and aren't at full strength. It takes nothing away from what we've achieved, how good our boys can be and how they can step up and play A-League."

The 35-year-old also praised the APIA fans who attended the game on Tuesday night as Victory's goals were greeted by a stunned silence from the home crowd.

Parisi added: "The crowd was awesome and when they score and there's no sound, it means we've got them on our side.

"It would've been amazing to see it at Lambert Park, but we understand why it wasn't there."

Finals Week Two – NPL NSW U20 Men's Preview

SUTHERLAND SHARKS V SYDNEY UNITED 58, SATURDAY 5.00PM AT LAMBERT PARK

It wasn't meant to be like this for 2017 double winners Sutherland Sharks.

After starting the season on fire and looking great chances of securing back to back trophy wins, Sutherland are now one loss away from elimination.

The Sharks have not enjoyed a happy end to the season with a combination of misfortune and poor results seeing the side win just two out of 10 fixtures.

Their latest defeat – a crushing 5-0 defeat to Sydney FC at Lily Homes Stadium last Saturday – was a reflection of the form the Sharks are in at the moment, and the massive effort that will be required to stop an in-form Sydney United 58 team on Saturday.

United 58 have a great chance to put the final nail in the coffin of the Sharks outfit at Lambert Park. In

contrast to Sutherland's poor run of results, the Reds have ended the campaign and entered the finals series as the competition's in-form side.

They racked up their fourth consecutive victory in a comfortable 3-0 win over Wollongong in last Saturday's elimination final. It was also their fourth game in a row without conceding, and the difference in confidence between these two sides now compared to the start of the campaign is staggering.

But the high-pressure environment of finals football may just sit more comfortably with Sutherland, despite their steady decline. It is now well and truly last chance saloon for the 2017 winners, who will be doing everything they can to remedy the heavy defeat at the hands of Sydney FC on Saturday and keep their title defence alive.

BLACKTOWN CITY V SYDNEY FC, SUNDAY 2.30PM AT LAMBERT PARK

The 2018 NPL NSW Men's U20 Grand Final awaits for one of these two sides, and it is sure to be a titanic contest when the pair face off at Lambert Park on Sunday afternoon.

After clinching this year's Premiership with a resounding 4-0 win over Sydney FC in round 21, Blacktown City will be eager to face off against the Sky Blues once more.

It will be a clash of styles when the two championship contenders meet.

Blacktown City have scored 23 goals less in the regular season than the free-scoring Sky Blues, but ultimately, it was the greater discipline and structure of the Blacktown

outfit that proved decisive in their premiership win.

The competition's best defensive side will get an almighty test of their resolve against the Sky Blues though. Sydney made an almighty statement of their ambitions after a hammering Sutherland 5-0 last weekend, in what was a merciless display of efficiency and ruthlessness from Giancarlo Italiano's men.

It was also a match that saw the Sky Blues perform with greater resilience and grit in defence, which had been the side's undoing in the regular season.