

nsw



By George Stavroulakis

APIA LEICHHARDT TIGERS – ROCKDALE CITY SUNS 8-2

APIA Reichhardt tigers have flexed their national Premier Leagues NSW Championship credentials with an incredible 8-2 demolition of Rockdale City Suns at Lambert Park on Saturday. Tigers' fans thought they had seen it all in Tuesday night's FFA Cup giant-killing of reigning A-League Champions Melbourne Victory, but the Lambert Park faithful will be pinching themselves again after witnessing their side move one game away from the grand final with a truly one-sided triumph.

The incredible rout began with the fifth-minute dismissal of Rockdale defender Blake Ricciuto, who was given straight red after tripping the goal-bound Sean Symons. APIA stalwart Themba Muata-Marlow buried the resulting penalty kick, and the floodgates opened.

Franco Parisi's glorious run and pass saw a rare goal for fullback David D'Apuzzo, while FFA Cup hero Tasuku Sekiya added a third from close range after Symons' shot had cannoned back off the foot of the post.

And when Howard Fondyke volleyed the Japanese attacker's cross past Ante Covic at the back post five minutes later, the Tigers were in dreamland.

The misery continued for Rockdale in the second stanza. Symons headed D'Apuzzo's centre home, and Paul Reid's side were reduced to nine when Aleksandar Canak was dismissed for his second booking.

Substitute Samuel Gulisano opened his first-grade account from the penalty spot after a Suns handball and soon had a brace – and APIA's seventh – after rifling in a deflected effort that left Covic rooted to the spot.

Rockdale pulled two consolation goals back via Alexander Malfara and Michael Neill, before Sekiya clinched his double, and fifth goal in a week, with a delightful lob over the former Western Sydney Wanderers gloveman.

Sekiya's dink proved to be the final kick of a crazy encounter, and undoubtedly an NPL NSW clash that will live long in the memory.

APIA coach Billy McColl somehow made sense of the contest following the match and hailed the resilience of his Tigers side for continuing to defy the odds.

"We're the best footballing team in the country," he remarked.

"We're the fittest team in the country, we've got no fear and we play with a smile on our



face and this team can go where ever it wants to go.

"The footballing gods were on our side, but I'm pleased for the boys. They're on a massive high after the win over Melbourne Victory in which we were out on our feet. But we got back up again – this team can achieve whatever it wants to achieve."

McCull's men will take on the loser of tomorrow's Grand Final qualifier between Sydney Olympic and Sydney United 58 next weekend.

Match Stats

APIA Leichhardt Tigers 8 (Muata-Marlow 10', D'Apuzzo 30', Sekiya 37', Fondyke 43', Symons 60', Gulisano 76', Gulisano 85', Sekiya 90+2)

Rockdale City Suns 2 (Malfara 84', Neill 89')

APIA Leichhardt Tigers: 13. David D'Apuzzo, 7. Howard Fondyke (17. Samuel Gulisano), 3. Paul Galimi, 2. Nathan Millgate (5. Stephan Adattini), 15. Themba Muata-Marlow, 1. Ivan Necevski (22. Blake Tuxford), 10. Franco Parisi, 20. Tasuku Sekiya, 4. Joshua Symons, 16. Sean Symons, 18. Adrian Ucchino

Substitutes not used: 19. Brandon Lundy, 12. Benjamin McCarron

Yellow cards: Symons 16'

Red cards: N/A

Rockdale City Suns: 8. Aleksandar Canak, 1. Ante Covic, 12. Idriss El Hafiane, 10. Harris Gaitatzis (3. Steven Hesketh), 11. Jonathan Grozdanovski (34. Alexander Malfara), 21. Michael Neill, 2. Daniel Petkovski, 6. Blake Ricciuto, 16. Isaac Savor, 7. Alec Uroevski (17. Toufic Alameddine)

Substitutes not used: 25. Jake Soutter, 15. Nicholas Petrillo

Yellow cards: Canak 7', 70', Savor 16', Covic 38', El Hafiane 57', Neill 63'

Red cards: Ricciuto 7', Canak 70'

1ST NPL NSW MEN S 2018 PRELIMINARY

Sydney United 58 - APIA Leichhardt Tigers FC

Saturday 1 September 19.00

Sydney United Sports Centre