



By George Stavroulakis

SIM URGES UNITED 58 FANS TO WILL THEM ON TO VICTORY THIS SATURDAY

APIA Leichhardt Tigers have been warned they will be in for a torrid reception at Sydney United Sports Centre this Saturday with Sydney United 58 winger Matt Sim calling on the vocal home support to be their twelfth man for this season defining match.

The season goes on the line for both United 58 and APIA with a rematch of their unforgettable preliminary semi-final from week one of the playoffs deciding who will take on Sydney Olympic in this season's decider next Sunday at Leichhardt Oval.

United 58's feverish support was ever-present at Lambert Park for that match as their side pulled off a shock win after a penalty shootout.

While the Red's come into this game reeling after a 4-0 defeat at the hands of Premiership winners and potential grand final opponents Sydney Olympic, Sim is confident the atmosphere and passionate support of the United 58 faithful will make their home ground a fortress for the do-or-die clash.

"There is no secret we have the best and most vocal fans in the competition," Sim said.

"They are always singing and chanting for the entire 90 minutes no matter the result and they really give us a major boost out on the park.

"We managed to frustrate APIA in their own backyard during the last match and it is going to be a far tougher task for them at Edensor Park.

"All the boys know the type of support we are going to get at our home ground so it



would be great if we had our biggest crowd of the season to cheer us towards a place in the grand final."

The former Central Coast Mariners player has been a big part of United 58's attack this season with his darting runs off the right wing creating headaches for opposition defences.

With the loss of Panny Nikas to a knee injury

against Sydney Olympic ahead of the finals series, Sim acknowledges he will have to work even harder to help shoulder the load of United 58's mercurial midfielder.

"Panny (Nikas) has done enough in this competition to garner respect every time he steps out onto the pitch," he said.

"Defences do tend to focus on Panny and

that creates more space for other players like myself to do their thing.

"Obviously without him there will be more pressure but I feel the way this team is built that we are the sum of our parts and not reliant on just one or two guys.

"We have a number of boys who can turn a match at any moment and that was proven in our last clash against APIA."

While United 58 had to take a more conservative approach after going down to ten-men after 40 minutes in their finals week one win, Sim believes his side will be more aggressive for the return fixture at their Edensor Park home ground.

"The result last match is sure to be in the back of their (APIA's) mind.

"It would've been the most frustrating game for them and their fans. They took 30 shots against a ten-man opposition and couldn't score until the 92nd minute.

"We don't take a backwards step and with a full contingent of players on the park at our home ground we will be able to go at them from the opening whistle.

"APIA are a tough side but everyone in this team is confident we have what it takes to beat them and move another step closer to

Muata-Marlow ready for redemption against United 58

APIA Leichhardt Tigers are determined to make amends for the disappointment of their shock finals week one loss to Sydney United 58, according to APIA defender Themba Muata-Marlow ahead of their preliminary final rematch on Saturday.

United 58, forced to play with ten-men for more than 75 minutes after the controversial send-off of Chris Payne, held out a ferocious APIA attack at Lambert Park before edging the home side 5-3 in a penalty shootout.

It was a frustrating result for APIA who dominated the game but had very little to show for it against a Red's team seemingly able to withstand everything thrown at them.

While APIA's fortunes have drastically turned since that much, centre back Muata-Marlow admits the preliminary semi-final result against United 58 still rankles his side.

"To be frank the result was

just really disappointing," he said.

"We took 30 shots and they took one and scored. It was a bizarre match and just one of those nights where we just couldn't do what we set out to.

"In the two games since that match we have shown what we are capable of, especially our big win last week against Rockdale and the incredible FFA Cup win against Melbourne Victory.

"Everyone in the squad is on a high but when we look back to that first finals game against Sydney United we know we could've done better."

It has been a brutal schedule in recent weeks for APIA as they balance finals football



and the FFA Cup with a squad short of depth.

Three games in seven days last week, including the historic win against Victory, has taken its toll on the team Muata-Marlow revealed.

However, the former Newcastle Jets player insists

the brilliant atmosphere and confidence in the squad is inspiring them to play some of their best football of the season.

"It's been a really tough schedule for us lately and I would be lying if I didn't admit my legs were a bit heavy from

the increased workload," Muata-Marlow said.

"Despite this the feeling around the club is really great at the moment and everyone is playing some really good football.

"I think we showed on Saturday that we haven't lost our ability to play at a high intensity and we will bring that same drive to this week's game.

"We've had the whole week off to get ready for this game so there will be no excuses if we're not at our best."

While APIA gave up the title of league best defence this year, instead becoming it's most potent attack, Muata-Marlow is confident the Tigers' backline has what

it takes to keep out everything United 58 throw at them.

"There is great chemistry in the team and especially for me with the other defenders," he said.

"We have really good balance across the back four and while statistically we haven't reached the same heights as last season I still think we can get the better of whoever we play.

"Sydney United 58 had a tough week last week losing 4-0 so they will be desperate to keep their season alive.

"It is going to be a difficult match but everyone is coming into this game on a high and determined to secure a return to the grand final for the second straight year."