



By George Stavroulakis

# SANCHEZ READY TO RUMBLE THIS SUNDAY



**When Sydney Olympic star Alejandro Sanchez swapped the top tiers of Spanish football for the National Premier Leagues NSW competition, little did he know the season ahead would be the most satisfying of his career.**

**Sanchez's Journey** to the NPL NSW is quite unique and includes experience playing against the world's best players in La Liga, including Juan Mata, David Silva and David Villa. **A rising** star in the academy of boyhood club Real Zaragoza, the 29-year-old would go on to play for the club's first team before building a career across club's in both the Spanish first and second divisions.

**What's even** more incredible is that he was born without a right hand and has never allowed this limitation hold him back.

**While Sanchez** admits he could've easily stayed playing in Spain for the rest of his career, the desire to see the world and play football in another country drove him to make the life changing decision which brought him to Sydney Olympic. **"Former Olympic** coach Gorka Etxeberria got in contact with me last year and said he was very interested in bringing me out to Australia to play," Sanchez said.

**"I had** no idea about the league or Sydney Olympic but I had

a feeling that I needed a change and for that reason alone the opportunity wasn't one I could pass up.

**"I feel** more satisfied with the past season than even my time playing in La Liga.

**"Moving to** Australia was always going to be a big risk but I feel it has paid off both on and off the pitch. I'm just loving my time here.

**"I feel** at home in Sydney and it has made everything just so easy."

**Arriving in** Australia at the end of 2017 to commence preseason training with his new club, Sanchez's time with Olympic nearly had a sudden and premature end when Etxeberria was sacked only a week out from the start of the regular season.

**The Spaniard** admitted he was sizing up other options including a return home after learning of Etxeberria's departure, but was convinced to stay the course after meeting incoming Olympic coach Abbas Saad.

**What appeared** to be a recipe for disaster proved to be a masterstroke for Sydney Olympic with Saad helping his star striker fire on all cylinders and score 17 goals in 22 matches.

**"In terms** of my football I think I have been able to play to my strengths and I feel my goal tally shows what I am capable of," he said.

**"Abbas is** a great coach and because he was a player himself he understands the best way to get the most out of his squad.

**"Before the** Abbas arrived the team was struggling and I was really worried if we would even win a game.

**"However, since** he has taken over the team we have really come together and gone from strength to strength.

**With a** grand final on the horizon, Sanchez sent a reminder to his rivals ahead of the competition decider with a hat trick in Olympic's 4-0 major semi-final win against Sydney United 58.

**While admitting** he is still coming to grips with the concept of finals football, Sanchez said he won't stop until Olympic takes home the trophy on grand final day.

**"The team** and the coach explained to me that it is like playing in a cup final because of course in Spain the season is decided by the team who finished on the top at the end of the season," he said.

**"For me** it is strange to think we could have potentially missed out on the biggest game of the season despite finishing in first place.

**"I'm excited** to play in this game and my confidence is high after scoring three goals against United 58.

**"No matter** who we come up against I know we have the quality to win."