

APIA LEGEND FRANCO PARISI READY FOR BATTLE ON SUNDAY

APIA Leichhardt Tigers are more than just a football club for their midfield maestro Franco Parisi.

It's a home.

The club legend has been playing the game he loves at Lambert Park for more than 20 years and has experienced both the good and bad they have gone through in that time.

Since joining APIA in 1994 as a junior, Parisi has forged a connection with the club which goes beyond the playing field.

"Football for me would not be possible anywhere else. It has been amazing to experience and have such close ties to this club," Parisi said.

"It is definitely a home and a place that has become a huge part of my life.

"There is something special about this club. there is an incredible spirit about the place which i noticed years ago and it has stuck with me ever since."

"If I weren't at APIA I wouldn't be playing at all. this club is the reason I have kept going because I just love being a part of it."

APIA return to the National Premier Leagues grand final for the second straight year after suffering a heartbreaking defeat after a penalty shoot to Manly United in 2017.

With a chance to atone for last year's defeat, Parisi said securing grand final glory with APIA would be something he could never forget.

"Winning the premiership last year was a dream come true. I was so happy to give this club and its fans the success it deserves," he said.

"Overall any success I have with APIA automatically goes to the top for me because these wins just mean so much more.

"The FFA Cup win against Melbourne Victory was unforgettable. To hear so many people singing the APIA song from the stands gave me chills. It was such an incredible moment.

"Hopefully we can recreate that in the grand final against Olympic."

However it hasn't always been bright times and title contention for APIA.

The club has come along way from the 2010 and 2012 seasons when they were battling relegation.

Nevertheless, Parisi said those seasons are remembered just as fondly as the seasons where APIA has won.

"From a personal point of view each season and each moment I have had with this club has meant something unique," he said.

"The seasons we were fighting relegation was just as important for me as these days when we are contending for the title and other honours.

"The work we did and lessons we learnt from those difficult times were the platform for us to build towards reaping the rewards we have received in recent seasons."

Despite being the oldest member of the APIA playing group, Parisi has taken on a more prominent role this season as the focal point of the side's midfield.

He said he has enjoyed the opportunity to play more minutes on the park and was determined to help his team triumph against Sydney Olympic.

"The current playing group is the most close knit team I have been apart of. The unity of these boys is just incredible," he said.

"They are a special group and nobody wants to let their teammates down.

"It's a great atmosphere to have around the squad. Everyone is so driven to achieve success as a team instead of individual honours."

Parisi admitted he has considered retirement before each of the past few seasons but his passion for the club kept bringing him back.

"For me football has always been about the love of the game before anything else," Parisi said.

"If I'm not completely passionate about something and willing to commit to it then I don't think it's worth doing.

"Undoubtedly my love for this club and the people keeps bringing me back.

"This club and the people involved deserve success. Hopefully we can deliver that on Sunday."

