



By George Stavroulakis

2018 National Premier Leagues NSW Men's Grand Final

SYDNEY OLYMPIC V - APIA LEICHHARDT TIGERS



Sunday September 9th - Leichhardt Oval 4pm Kick-Off

Tickets are now on sale for the 2018 National Premier Leagues NSW Men's Grand Final between Premiers APIA Leichhardt Tigers. The pinnacle event will be held on Sunday September 9th at Leichhardt Oval, Leichhardt. Fans are encouraged to purchase tickets online to avoid queues at the gate. Gates will open for the U18's Grand Final at 9am while sales for tickets will commence at 10:30am. Get in early for the Adults Early Bird Special of \$10 with the offer ending on Wednesday 5th of September at 11:45pm. An afternoon

kick-off will see the two best Senior Grade teams in the NPL NSW Men's compete for the 2018 Championship. The Grand Final is sure to be a superb showcase of NSW National Premier Leagues football at its best so whether you're a neutral football fan or follow one of the competing teams, snap up your ticket to the game today. Purchase tickets to the NPL NSW Men's Grand Final. A reminder that Children 15 years and under are admitted FREE entry if they comply with the below conditions:

Maximum of 4 children (15 years and under) per paying adult ticket holder. All children must be accompanied by an adult to enter the venue. Proof of age may be required to be shown upon entry. Official NPL NSW Men's Grand Final Kick-off times:
U18 - 10am Kick-Off
Sydney FC v Rockdale City Suns FC U20 - 12:30pm
Sydney FC Sutherland Sharks 1st Grade - 4pm Kick-Off
Sydney Olympic v APIA Leichhardt Tigers

2018 National Premier Leagues NSW Men's Grand Final

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The biggest game of the National Premier Leagues NSW season has arrived and months of blood sweat and tears will culminate in a blockbuster clash of the titans. Premiers Sydney Olympic FC will go head to head with APIA Leichhardt Tigers to see who will be crowned champion for the 2018 season. Olympic and APIA finished the season in first and second place respectively and are fitting combatants for this year's decider. It has been historic seasons for both clubs with Olympic winning their first premiership in seven years, while APIA return to the decider for the second straight year breaking a number of goal scoring records on the way.

Adding a little extra flavour to the fixture is the fact Olympic pinched the title from APIA's grasp on the final day of the regular season and are now playing for a league double. This combined with the Tiger's determination to atone for their heartbreaking penalty shootout loss to Manly in last year's grand final shows that neither side will be struggling to find inspiration for this marquee match-up. With the pain of that grand final defeat in the back of their mind, APIA raced out of the blocks this season to deliver a season of thrilling attacking football.

No team in the NPL NSW has been as prolific as the Billy McColl coached APIA team with their haul of 62 goals in the regular season setting a new league record. Olympic on the other hand has been an example of consistency with their impressive form helping them to a run of nine games unbeaten during the first half of the campaign. It was the longest streak of its type by any team this season. Their 4-0 drubbing of Sydney United in the major semi-final was a warning that they won't be stopped on their endeavour to take home the premiership and championship double.

On the park both teams have squads bristling with talent. Olympic have the best defence in the competition conceding only 19 goals. Their attack was also not to be sneezed at as they netted 40 goals - the second best tally in the league. Spanish striker Alex Sanchez has been a revelation for the Abbas Saad



coached Olympic scoring 17 goals in the regular season and followed it up with a hat trick in his one finals match. Central defender Tom Whiteside has become a solid force in the heart of the Belmore based side's back line and has only improved since the departure of established stopper George Timotheou mid way through the campaign. While Olympic is prominently a team of young talent, established veterans Will Angel and Paul Henderson provide the team with experience and composure.

The fact APIA have made it through to the grand final is proof of the fluidity and flexibility of their squad. The mid-year transfer window featured the departure of a number of players from Lambert Park, including Olympic midfielder Zach Mackenzie, while star striker Jordan Murray was snapped up by Central Coast Mariners after his haul of 22 goals broke the regular season scoring record. It has meant plenty of shuffling the deck for McColl and the way his players have been able to step up into different roles in the team as well as play more minutes than usual has been a big part of their success.

APIA club legend Franco Parisi has been one of the biggest examples of this with the midfield maestro experiencing somewhat of a renaissance during the past two months as he has taken on a more central role in the Tigers attack. Defensively APIA has struggled to keep their opposition scoreless, but on their day are tough to break down. Themba Muata-Marlow is a monster in the heart of APIA's back line with his athleticism and eye for the game making him a nightmare for strikers.

This game presents a number of key match-ups with some of the competition's most talented players going head to head. **..Can Olympic's** league best defence be able to stop APIA's record setting attack?

..Will Alex Sanchez be too much for APIA's back line to handle? **..Will the** scars from last year's grand final penalty shoot out loss and this year's final day premiership capitulation weigh too heavily on APIA?

..Does Olympic have the fortitude to beat Olympic on the biggest stage?

The two sides have faced off three times this season in all competition's with APIA winning two and one match ending in a draw. While Olympic will have the mental edge as premiers, APIA's good results against their grand final opponents and recent comeback wins could give them a slight advantage.

Whatever the outcome this afternoon, goals, excitement and entertainment are sure to be on the menu. However, when it's all said and done, only one team can be crowned champion.