



By George Stavroulakis

# ST GEORGE FC CROWNED NPL 2 NSW MEN'S CHAMPIONS

St George FC were crowned National Premier Leagues 2 NSW Mens Champions in a wild shootout 4-3 after the two sides couldn't be separated after 120 minutes, locked at 3-3 on a blustery afternoon at Lily's Football Centre.

**The Saints** roared into a two-goal lead thanks to a pair of well-taken goals from Jason Romero – the first swept home from close range in the first half followed by a spot kick on the hour mark that had the Saints marching to the trophy.

**Mounties Wanderers** FC weren't going to die wondering though. Spurred by the introduction of Michael Chklovskiy, their own Romero, Beneit clawed one back in the 70th minute before Noah Chianese's header levelled things in the 74th took us to extra time.

**From there**, Mounties took the advantage, Chianese completed his brace in the first period of extra time from close range, making it 3-2.

**There was** a final twist though, as Jason Romero powered home a header for the dreaded penalty shootout.

**Despite being** pegged back twice, St George FC kept their nerve in the spot kicks. Jason Romero had his first effort saved but their following four takers all slotted home, including Matias Da Silva Santos with the final kick to capture the trophy whilst custodian Anthony Costa made two vital saves to send the trophy to St George FC.

**On a** warm, windy afternoon in Sydney's west, both sides took their time to settle into the contest. The Saints were the first to find some comfort as Patrick O'Shea nodded over in the sixth minute followed by a range-finder from Jordan Morfitis.

**Mounties had** some bright moments. Most of the action came through Bruno Pivato, the midfielder delivered some superb set pieces in the challenging conditions, but the Wanderers weren't able to convert his efforts.

**For St George FC**, Morfitis was denied by a lunging last-moment challenge from Dominic Brischetto in the 16th but the Saints were in total control.

**They turned** that control into the first goal of the contest just before half-time.

**It came** from who else? Jason Romero.

**The star** striker scored 13 goals across the season and added his 14th when he swept home a delightful cross, making it 1-nil to St George FC headed into the half-time whistle.

**Romero continued** to pull the strings after the interval.

**He thrashed** a low free-kick into the wall in the 49th then sent Hussein Akil on-goal but he sprayed the effort wide. For his next trick, he added a second goal of the afternoon.

**This time**, it came from the spot. A high foot in the area from a Mounties Wanderers defender gave them the chance, then Romero, calm as a cucumber, sent the penalty into the bottom right corner, making it 2-nil.

**Sensing he** needed to make some changes, Mounties Wanderers coach, Terry Palapanis sent on Michael Chklovskiy on to change their fortunes.

**He brought** some spark to their play, also brought their first goal of the evening.

**Again, it** came from the spot. From another tricky set piece from Pivato, a Mounties attacker was brought down as Kris Griffiths-Jones pointed to the spot. Raul Beneit Romero stepped

up, fired the spot kick home, for 2-1.

**Buoyed by** their momentum, Mounties were quickly level.

**They fizzed** the ball around with some purpose which stung the Saints defense. Pivato went close in the 72nd before Noah Chianese did find the equaliser.

**Mitchell Davidson** shrugged off his defender from the right before he lofted it onto the head of Chianese, the striker drilled his header over as the Saints were stunned by the quickfire double act.

**The mood** around Lily's Football Centre had definitely changed.

**Mounties dominated** the fading moments of the 90 minutes.

**Pivato put** an effort right onto the head of Tomislav Mijic



whose effort was saved.

**For the Saints**, their flurry of chances in the 77th was the best as the ball refused to find the net.

**Thus we** needed extra-time.

**Once again**, Mounties continued to have the run of play. Chklovskiy and Pivato both had chances they spurned before Chianese couldn't prod home in the first fifteen of extra-time.

**Chianese, again** was the saviour.

**The striker** was on the spot after the keeper couldn't clean up the ball, slamming the ball home, completing the turnaround for Mounties, 3-2 after 103 minutes.

**The chances** came thick and fast, as both sides looked to finish the contest in the 120 minutes. Mounties looked razor sharp on the counter, Beneit Romero, couldn't sort his feet then Pivato had an effort pushed away.

**St George** were frustrated. Jason Romero clipped an effort over the bar, followed by chaos in the box that fell kindly for the Saints several times but no one could find the final touch. Considering the see-saw nature of the contest, there was a final twist.

**It came** to St George's lethal marksman. Jason Romero combined well with substitute Nicholas Paras, the former delivered the perfect ball for Romero, he nodded it home, 3-3 and off to the dreaded shootout.

**Mounties took** the early advantage in penalties. Luke Kairies stepped up to save the first spot kick from Tarik Ercan. From there though, St George were perfect from the spot, as four straight takers converted while Mounties failed on two occasions, Andre Schroder's effort saved. Same for Anthony Schmidt's that was touched onto the bar.

**The moment** of glory belonged to St George FC substitute, Matias Da Silva Santos. Knowing he had the spot kick to win it, he walked to the spot confidently, and slammed it home which sparked wild celebrations from the Saints faithful as they finished 2018 on a high.

**Following the** presentation, a jubilant St George FC coach, Wally Saviour reflected on the rollercoaster nature of the contest and ultimately, a deserved victory his side.

**"Sometimes it** is the little things in football that change momentum. That [the penalty call] was that, but they shifted and had nothing to else. They got the equaliser which took us to extra-time.

**"It has** been an incredible season. There has been some chaos, through it all, the team stuck together and we got the result we wanted at the end of the day," said Saviour.

**Speaking on** his two stars, Saviour enjoyed the third goal from Romero, "especially as he isn't renowned for his headers," remarked the coach before he added that he is a "special player for the side" before a final praise for keeper Anthony Costa, who he named "one of the best keepers in the league after the saves" after the series of saves he pulled off across the game.

**For Mounties**, they will be disappointed about the nature of the defeat, but from their mid-table position halfway through the season, to make the Grand Final is a reflection of the spirit at the club as they looked to build next year.

## Match Stats

**Saturday 15 September 2018**

**Lily's Football Centre, Seven Hills**

**Referee:** Kris Griffith-Jones

**Assistant Referees:** Nick Backo & Joon Park

**Fourth Official:** Tim Danaskos

**St George FC 3** (J. Romero '39, '58, & '115)

**Mounties Wanderers FC 3** (B. Romero '70, Chianese '74 & '103)

**St George FC** won 4-3 on penalties

**St George FC:** 3. NASREDDINE Ali, 4. AKIL Hussein (10. PARAS '83), 6. O'SHEA Patrick, 8. ERCAN Tarik, 9. ROMERO Jason, 11. MORFITIS Jordan (7. DA SILVA SANTOS '72), 12. MORABITO Anthony (17. LEKOSKI '87), 14. JEONG Chanhwee, 21. COSTA Anthony, 23. TWENEBOA Lennox, 29. KYRIACOU Alexander

**Subs not used:** 1. KUBECKA Bailey 5. BANDUR Jacob

**Yellow cards:** Jeong Tweneboa

**Red cards:** nil

**Mounties Wanderers FC:** 1. KAIRIES Luke, 2. MIJIC Tomislav, 6. SCHMIDT Anthony, 8. PIVATO Bruno, 9. SMITH Tai (18. CKLOVSKI '63), 11. DAVIDSON Mitchell, 14. CHIANESE Noah (25. JEFFRY '105), 16. BRISCHETTO Dominic (10. VIERA '95), 23. SCHROEDER Andre, 27. BENEIT ROMERO Raul, 29. INGLE Jake

**Subs not used:** 4. HESS Alfred 30. ROZMAN Tomas

**Yellow cards:** Brischetto Pivato Schmidt