

Olympic defeat Perth SC to advance to NPL Finals Series Semis

Sydney Olympic will take on South Australian Champions Campbelltown City SC in the NPL Finals Series as the 2018 NPL NSW Men's Premiers and Champions defeated Western Australian side Perth SC at Lambert Park on Sunday by one goal to nil.

A sixth minute penalty converted by club captain James Madonis was all that separated the two teams in what was a fiercely contested battle as both sides went hammer and tong for a place in the NPL Finals Series. Campbelltown City powered in to the final four of the NPL Finals Series and were joined by Lions FC, who will play Heidelberg United in the Semi Finals. The Adelaide-based side took the initiative against their ACT opposition when a first-half goal from Alex Mullen

gave the Red Devils the advantage at the break. The South Australian side battled hard to find a way back into the game but Lui Ditroia's 78th-minute finish gave Campbelltown a cushion, before Ditroai doubled his tally in stoppage time to wrap up a convincing 3-0 win. Based on the NPL Finals Series format, Olympic will travel to South Australia where the Blues hope they can bring back the victory next Saturday.

ABBAS SAAD: "I AM IN A PLACE WHERE I WANT TO BE"

Abbas Saad speaks to FTBL about the reasons behind Sydney Olympic's historic league and Grand Final double in the NSW NPL this season.



As a player, his quality was without question.

When Spanish coach Gorka Etxeberria departed Sydney Olympic just a week before the NSW NPL season kicked off, the club was without a head coach and on the brink of a crisis.

A SOS was sent out to ex-Olympic legend Abbas Saad who was working as a television commentator in Asia at the time.

Many in his new team would have been too young to remember just how good a player their new coach was in the mid 80s and 90s.

But talk to Olympic fans who witnessed Saad's exploits on the pitch and their eyes light up.

Especially when they recall that 1989/90 NSL season where the striker scored 13 goals and won the Joe Marston Medal for his man of match performance to help the club win its first Grand Final.

Saad was a unique specimen - the type player that is rarely produced in Australia any more, a striker with an eye for goal and great technical ability.

He could make the crowd surge to their feet in anticipation every time he touched the ball.

Saad played six internationals for the Socceroos and won league and cup titles in Malaysia with Johor and Singapore and has an even bigger cult following in Asia than he does in Australia.

But his time as a coach was limited to a stint with Penrith Nepean United in 2009, head coach of the Australian Deaf Football Team and a spell coaching in Malaysia.

And when he took the reins just a few days before Olympic's first game of the season against Bonnyrigg, there may have been a few heads being scratched around Belmore.

However, history shows the decision to put the ex-Socceroo in charge was inspired.

The highlight was Olympic's performance in last weekend's Grand Final win over APIA 3-1 that earned the club an historic double after winning the league a few weeks earlier - a feat which hasn't been achieved since 2011.

ALEX SANCHEZ



Born with one hand, Alex Sanchez is among a select few players in Australia who has appeared in Spain's top league - La Liga.

Alex Sanchez is one of a small group of players who've played in the top division of Spanish football, La Liga, and to have played in Australia. But Sanchez isn't even playing at a professional level. Instead he's helping push Sydney Olympic to the NSW National Premier Leagues title over the weekend. The 29-year-old striker was born with only one hand. After initially viewing it as a distraction as he built his career in Spain, he's now keen to prove himself as a role model. He's also studying a PHD in human rights in sport as he aims to inspire children playing sport with a disability.

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