



By George Stavroulakis

NPL 3 NSW MEN'S 2018 GRAND FINAL

The National Premier Leagues 3 NSW Men's competition comes to an exciting crescendo on Sunday as Premiers St George City FA take on SD Raiders at Valentine Sports Park (3:30pm) with a huge crowd expected to be present.

A special congratulations in fact must go out to the St George City FA club, who take their place in all three Grand Finals on the day, meeting Hawkesbury City in the U18s at 9:30am, before tackling Sydney University in the U20s at 12:30pm.

Let's take a close look at the two combatants to see what the football fraternity can look forward to in the 1st Grade Grand Final on Sunday.

1st Grade GRAND FINAL ST GEORGE CITY FA – SD RAIDERS

Valentine Sports Park No.2
Sunday, September 23 @ 3-30pm



After 29 weeks of competitive football, the National Premier Leagues 3 NSW Men's competition climaxes on Sunday when St George City FA battle it out with SD Raiders for the coveted Championship trophy in this season's Grand Final.

St George City FA have been the standout club in 2018, having already secured the 1st Grade Premiership, as well as the Club Championship, which has earned the club the right to promotion to NPL2.

An unprecedented treble would be a fantastic way to complete what has been a remarkable year for the club as they look to ice the cake.

The Premiership title gave St George City FA a week's rest, and they bounced back in to action last weekend with a 4-0 drubbing of Dunbar Rovers to take their place in the Grand Final.

St George City FA have now netted 83 goals this year, with 3 players reaching double figures. Geoffrey Lino has scored 18 goals, Samuel Messam 17, and Steve Kuzmanovski grabbed his 10th in last week's victory over Dunbar.

In fact, 19 players in total have found the net this season, evidence of an attacking and entertaining brand of football played by the side throughout 2018.

Emanuel Koumis is a youngster who has broken in to the starting side in the latter part of the season, and is playing with confidence at the top of a swift front third.

James Spanoudakis has recovered from some intermittent injuries which threatened to ruin his season, and the number 10 is always there or thereabouts when St George City FA are pushing forward.

Four players in the St George City FA team will now be experiencing back-to-back NPL 3 Grand Finals, giving the team that added edge when it comes to nerves on the big day.

Musashi Kokubo, Alvaro Malmierca and Luke Burke were part of the victorious 2017 Fraser Park team that overcame a Rydalmere Lions team that included Matthew Mayora – all

four will now join forces this year to try and help their new club, St George City FA, collect the 2018 trophy.

St George City FA come in to this game riding a wave of momentum that has seen them win 8 and draw 2 of their last 10 games, scoring 22 goals and conceding just 7, and will no doubt be confident of continuing that run with a win in the Grand Final.

SD Raiders have earned their spot in this season's decider on the back of some effective late season form that saw them storm in to the Top Six.

The Raiders were unbeaten in their final 9 games of the competition to snare 4th spot on the ladder. Then the Raiders accounted for Bankstown City 6-5 in a penalty shootout following a 1-1 draw after extra time, before overcoming a stubborn Hawkesbury City 2-1 in last week's Semi Final to book their spot in the Grand Final.

That's 6 wins and 5 draws in their last 11 matches, evidence of the team's resilience and determination not to give up.

Daniel Bittar continues to be the go to man in the side with his 19 goals this campaign, including the headed winner in last week's 2-1 victory over Hawkesbury City.

The centre of the park contains two of the busiest midfielders in the league in Dylan Stivala and Sebastian Malfara, their work rate from box to box as well as their understanding a real strength for the Raiders.

Matias Toro Suazo is a player who plays with purpose, confident with running at players and forceful in his application, whilst Lucas Rossi has been an able support in attack with some real penetrating runs down the flank. Both players have also chimed in with 7 goals each to prove their added value to the side.

The battle for the Championship trophy could very well be decided by the two tacticians behind the Grand Final combatants, with both having played the game at the highest

level, and both now happy to pass on their experience to this next generation.

St George City FA coach, Manny Spanoudakis, is a very disciplined and tactical coach, crossing his 't's' and dotting his 'i's', and demanding the same application from his players to each task as it presents itself. The evidence is in the pudding as his side look to add to the two trophies they have already won in 2018 by making history with a Championship title come Sunday.

Nicky Carle will be quick to credit his players with their qualification for Sunday's Grand Final, but he must take some of the acknowledgment for their successful charge, having transformed SD Raiders in to a swift attacking unit, capable of fluent entertaining football that can tear opposition teams apart as well as appease the fans – not too dissimilar to his own playing style during his career.

This Sunday's Grand Final will present a barn storming finish to what has been an exhilarating 2018 season in the National Premier Leagues 3 NSW Men's competition – will St George City FA win the Grand Final and take home the treble in what has already been a remarkable season, or can Nicky Carle's SD Raiders spoil their party to claim the Championship trophy?

Get out to Valentine Sports Park No.2 on Sunday afternoon to see it all unravel.

TALE OF THE TAPE

R8 on April 28th @ Jubilee Oval;

St George City FA 6 (Messam 3, Lino 2, Trajkovski)

SD Raiders 0

R21 on July 28th @ Ernie Smith Reserve;

SD Raiders 0

St George City FA 0