



By George Stavroulakis

MARK ROBERTSON AWARDED CHARLES VALENTINE MEDAL

Mt Druitt Town Rangers' long serving and influential administrator Mark Robertson was awarded one of the biggest honours at this year's Football NSW's Silver Medal Dinner with the coveted Charles Valentine Award.

Robertson's efforts to the world game has truly impacted everyone at Mt Druitt Town Rangers over the last 20 years with his involvement with the club kick starting in 1999. His son won selection to play for the Rangers and it was there he offered to help the club out as a team manager. The club's rapid rise has largely coincided with the appointment of 'Robbo' as he is affectionately known to his fellow peers, as the club President in 2011. The stability and guidance he provided the Committee and club he leads was not just results and elevation through the Leagues but engagement with Football NSW that has seen:

- **inclusion** into the Football NSW Futsal program
- **inclusive** / special needs / Athletes with disabilities (AWD)
- **inclusion** in the Football NSW Futsal League
- **inclusion** of Skills Acquisition Program
- **Inclusion** of Girls/Women's program

Through these initiatives, the Rangers team base has grown from 7 teams up to 19 teams. 'Robbo' has not only supported and encouraged player growth but rolled the sleeves up even further to make it a success and beneficial for all that embrace it. This has been evident with the successes of both the club's youth and senior systems all of which have won much silverware over the years as well

as gaining promotion year upon year with the motto 'home-grown development'. Robbo's volunteer efforts know few bounds, while giving so selflessly to Rangers, he continued to volunteer for his Association club Doonside Hawks, his contributions were recognised with Life Membership in 2004. Mount Druitt Town Rangers formally recognised his contribution with Life Membership in 2014. Always 'doing his bit' for the club, be it player pick-up, drop-off, trouble with fees, Robbo always finds a way for players to play. He'd be selling Meat Raffles weekly, open Popondetta Park, be the first one at the pitch setting up and the last to leave cleaning up. Robbo co-ordinates the purchasing of gear, trial games, food and drink at all home matches as well as Trophies. Robbo's respect goes way beyond the gates of Popondetta, he has a contact at just about every Football NSW club who know and love him, as do all who know him at Football NSW headquarters. As a young boy, Robbo first played football as a 4-year-old in the under 6s until under 15's when his beloved club Padstow RSL folded. Not able to bring himself to play for one of the 'opposition clubs', he turned to refereeing. Loyal – he



needn't look far for his role models, they were close in his life, his Godfather Don Anderson and his father Ron devoted themselves to developing junior football forming the South Bankstown club. Volunteering is in his blood. Robbo has certainly done them proud. Robbo played Seniors in Campbelltown and at Doonside for many years. Many local charitable causes have also benefitted from Robbo's generosity too via food and Christmas toy drives, partnerships with organisations and local special purpose schools as well as universities. What Robbo has contributed to football over the last 54 years as a player, referee, club administrator and currently as President is rarely rivalled.

All as a volunteer. It is Robbo's generous, loyal and selfless approach to everything he has contributed to football, his passion and desire to see football overcome prejudice and perceptions. Robbo's sense of 'inclusion' is clearly visible. Football NSW would like to congratulate Mark Robertson on receiving such an accolade.

Alex Sanchez.. 21 goals for Olympic

Striker Alex Sanchez says his Sydney Olympic coach Abbas Saad is on a par with the quality in Spain's top leagues.

Sanchez spent almost a decade in the elite tiers of Spanish football with clubs like Real Zaragoza and Osasuna, where he played alongside Western Sydney Wanderers striker Oriol Riera.

The Spaniard's 21 goals for Olympic this season helped secure the former NSL club a NSW NPL League and Grand Final double for first time in seven seasons.

The classy striker may have been mentored by top class coaches but the 29-year-old is keen to put Saad's coaching acumen alongside some of his previous managers.

"He is one of the best coaches that I've ever had," he told FTBL.

"He has been absolutely magnificent for the club. Abbas knows how to manage people and that is the most important thing for a coach.

"Because we all know how to play on the pitch, and if you know how to manage a group of players it's going to be really good for a team.

"I remember the first chat that we had. Abbas told me that he was a striker and he was going to teach me a lot of things about Australian soccer.

"I really appreciate those words and we have had a strong



relationship. Not just like a coach and a player but a relationship between two people that went beyond football." Sanchez's La Liga debut for Real Zaragoza in 2009/10 came against Valencia who at that time had a team featuring Spanish superstars Juan Mata, David Silva and David Villa. While not suggesting that NSW NPL is on par, Sanchez did admit that he was surprised at the quality of football on display.

"A lot of people told me that Australia soccer was going to

be very bad quality but it's not too bad for me," he said. "The big difference between Australian and Spanish soccer is tactically.

"There are many strong teams in the league. I remember playing against Blacktown – they are so strong.

"APIA and Sydney Olympic are the strongest but there are other many any strong teams in the competition also.

"But generally speaking the level is very good in Australia." After overcoming Perth SC last weekend, Olympic travel to South Australia to take on fellow NPL side Campbelltown City on Saturday afternoon for a spot in the National Premier Leagues 2018 Grand Final.

And Sanchez would love to add a third winners' medal to his season's collection.

"We are pretty confident," he said. "We have been winning a lot of games in the last couple of months so we are ready.

"I've enjoyed playing in Australia. It's been the most beautiful year in my life not just on the pitch but off the pitch.

"The experience has been magnificent for me and the team has been perfect. We want to win the treble and personally it has been awesome."