



By George

St George City FA crowned NPL 3 NSW Men's Champions

St George City FA - SD Raiders 2-0

Grand Final

The NPL 3 NSW Men's Championship title belongs to St George City FA following their 2-0 triumph in the Grand Final on Sunday afternoon at Valentine Sports Park No.2.

Following a scoreless first half, two goals in the second half gave St George City FA the unprecedented treble, ending the 2018 season with the 1st Grade Premiership and Championship double, as well as clinching the Club Championship.

Such was the state of affairs for St George City FA that there was no starting berth for either of their two top goalscorers this season, with Geoffry Lino and Sam Messam taking their place on the substitutes bench, along with Kyoji Mori.

The opening half was predictably a tight affair, although St George City FA started the better, spraying the ball around and trying to stretch the Raiders' across their half.

Emanuel Koumis was first to threaten for St George City FA, his 5th minute near post glancing header from a James Spanoudakis corner kick rebounding off the near upright before being cleared by a Raiders' defender.

St George City FA went close again on ten minutes following another James Spanoudakis corner, but Musashi Kokubo's header cleared the Raiders' cross bar.

Raiders had their first opportunity in the 19th minute, when Sebastian Malfara whipped over a curling free kick that beat everyone – defender and attacker alike – on its way past the far post.

Lucas Rossi then managed to pick the pocket of a St George City FA defender on 33 minutes near the corner flag. Rossi slipped a pass inside to Matias Toro Suazo, who's angled snapshot was blocked by Chris Marques – the NSW NPL 3 Men's Goalkeeper of the Year – in the St George goal. Both defensive units stood firm and were quick to play percentages at times by simply clearing the danger, but the game needed a goal and almost got it just prior to half time.

James Spanoudakis received a ball on the left played in by Alvaro Malmierca, and he squared for Emanuel Koumis, who had little on at the edge of the box.

Koumis took a couple of touches before unleashing a superb curling effort that smacked against the inside of the Raiders upright before racing along the goal line and away from danger.

Koumis had been a real handful throughout, using his solid frame to ask questions of the Raiders' defence, and his strike was almost due reward for his application during the first half.

The half time reprieve gave both coaches – Nicky Carle of SD Raiders and Manny Spanoudakis of St George City FA – an opportunity to talk to their charges and provide some added direction, given the game was evenly poised at 0-0.

Both teams had wonderful opportunities to open the scoring early on in the second stanza.

On 50 minutes, a drifting corner kick was collected by Matthew Mayora near the edge of the Raiders' penalty area. Showing calm and composure, Mayora brought the

ball down, waltzed inside a defender, before hitting a snap shot that was well parried by Raiders' custodian, Michael Rutherford.

Just 4 minutes later and it was the Raiders turn to go agonisingly close, when Sebastian Malfara hit a grass cutter from outside the box that took a cruel deflection off Bill Tsanidis, the St George City skipper.

The ball changed paths and was heading in to the St George City net, but keeper, Chris Marques, flung himself to his left to divert the ball out of play.

With tensions building, it was St George City FA who edged themselves in front on 58 minutes.

Spanoudakis played a short give-and-go corner to Alvaro Malmierca, before delivering a near post cross that was stabbed home from close range by Musashi Kokubo, much to the delight of the St George City fans.

Kokubo was later voted the game's Man-of-the-Match, on the back of a high box to box work rate, and his goal, was just reward for a huge effort by the central midfielder.

St George City FA had the goal they so desperately wanted, and began to solidify as a unit, with the defensive quartet of Thomas, Mayora, Tsanidis and Turrin repelling anything the Raiders could throw at them.

Malfara was at it again for Raiders on 69 minutes, receiving a short corner from John Fahmi before producing a cracking effort that missed St George's far post by a metre or so.

Geoffry Lino and Sam Messam made their entry within the final quarter of an hour, adding some fresh legs in attack as St George City FA searched for the second killer goal, and it finally arrived in the 86th minute.

Kerim Kumsuz shrugged off a couple of attempts to stop him as he proceeded down the middle, playing the ball on for Sam Messam to toe poke to an unmarked James Spanoudakis, to the left of the Raiders goal inside.

Sensing the moment had arrived, the fans held their breath as Spanoudakis took a touch on to his right foot, before striking a firm shot past Raiders goal keeper, Michael Rutherford, to send the St George City FA contingent in to delirium.

The Raiders mustered one last effort on full time, when



a free kick by their keeper, Michael Rutherford, was tipped over his cross bar by his opposite number, Chris Marques, but that was all she wrote as the full time whistle shrieked, with St George City claiming the Championship title.

It had been a huge effort by the Raiders to make it to the final day of the season, having knocked over both Bankstown City

and Hawkesbury City after finishing the season in 4th spot on the competition ladder. The Raiders can hold their heads high after a strong season overall, and they were best served in the Grand Final by the hard working Sebastian Malfara in the midfield, whilst captain, John Raiti, provided a real presence in central defence.

What can you say about St George City FA that hasn't already been said?

In the Grand Final, there really wasn't a bad player in the St George City FA lineup, with Musashi Kokubo picking up the Man of the Match plaudits, Alvaro Malmierca and Kerim Kumsuz playing supporting and effective roles in the midfield, whilst James Spanoudakis looked lively in attack, and was involved in both goals.

The St George City FA club was involved in all three Grand Finals on the day, losing the U18s on penalties, whilst winning the U20s 2-0, and of course the 1st Grade 2-0, to go with the Premiership and Club Championship titles already in their cabinet.

Congratulations to Head Coach, Manny Spanoudakis, and the entire St George City FA club, its players, coaches, and officials, for a dominating 2018 season, and we wish