



By George Stavroulakis

# 5 key moments that defined round one

It was the opening round of the new A-League season... and got predictably sidetracked by a Video Assistant Referee controversy, despite some quality football and an upset or two

## All eyes on the refs, not VAR

**The VAR** system was introduced last season and constantly made the headlines for all the wrong reasons.

**Now in** its second season - and after it was mostly used successfully in the World Cup, most A-League fans understand how it should work. It's time for A-League referees to catch up.

**The controversial** penalty decision awarded to Melbourne City in the Melbourne Derby was followed by similar dubious decisions on Sunday with Wellington and Brisbane.

**Even after** countless replays, there is still debate over the derby penalty decision. The referee just wanted to see if the foul was inside or outside the box apparently.

**Fans, players, coaches and pundits** just wanted to see where the foul was...? An A-League tweet video later insisted there was a contact...but was it a foul? Really? And a clear and obvious error?

**On Sunday** the referees constantly referred to VAR, with yet more contentious decisions.

**Wellington Phoenix** were awarded a questionable penalty when Mitch Nicholls was supposedly dragged down by Newcastle Jet Kaine Sheppard, while Adam Taggart and Kalifa Cissé had legitimate goals ruled out for offside for both Brisbane Roar and Central Coast Mariners.

**Monday morning** should be for discussing football, not about refs studying video replays over and over again...and still getting it wrong.

**Reds in** desperate need of a finisher

**It's been** the question haunting Adelaide United since Bruce Djite left - who is their main goal scorer? On Friday night against Sydney FC, coach Marco Kurz's gameplan was foiled the moment Baba Diawara was ruled out a few hours before kick-off, after George Blackwood had already been omitted a couple of days earlier.

**Despite the** blow, United were on top up until about the 60th minute and got a goal through left-back Scott Galloway, but needed a proven goal scorer to help them kill off Steve Corica's side. In the end, Sydney's own proven goal scorer Adam Le Fondre took his only chance of the match, leaving Kurz to wonder what could have been.

**Last season,** Ryan Kitto was Adelaide's top scorer with just seven strikes to his name. They still made it into finals football, but if they had someone like Oriol Riera, Ross McCormack or even Roy Krishna, could they have been capable of even more?



## Experienced heads lead the way for Rudan's Phoenix

**Mark Rudan** got off to a perfect start on his managerial debut in the A-League in Sunday's early kick-off, as the Nix stunned last season's runners-up Newcastle Jets 2-1.

**It was** just the second time Phoenix have won an opening week fixture, but it was the leadership from their more experienced figures which stood out. Andrew Durante, Steven Taylor and Roy Krishna all put in excellent displays, as well as inspiring youngsters such as Liberato Cacace and Sarpreet Singh to put in their own impressive performances.

**Durante and** Taylor partnered up like two peas in a pod, with Taylor sharing the leadership in defence and Durante proving to be a real threat from set pieces. Meanwhile down the other end Krishna was immense, leading Wellington's press by constantly chasing down lost causes.

**The Fijian's** unselfish running off the ball creates space for others, with Singh in particular being a beneficiary. The pacey 31-year-old was rewarded with a deserved goal late on to seal the points, equalling Paul Ifill's all-time goal scoring record for

Wellington with his 33rd strike for the club. **Taggart finds** the net...eventually

**In what** was a heated off-season transfer saga, Adam Taggart moved on from Perth Glory to pursue a new opportunity under John Aloisi at Brisbane Roar, infuriating Glory owner Tony Sage who labelled the fringe Socceroo a 'liar' over the move.

**Despite the** backlash, the 25-year-old has knuckled down in the off-season under Aloisi but experienced one of his stranger performances against the Mariners.

**The former** Newcastle striker showcased how he can be so inconsistent on Sunday, showing fantastic movement but constantly lacking the finishing touch in a frustrating first half which saw repeated shots cannon past the woodwork.

**But after** the break, Taggart was much more clinical and found the back of the net not once, but twice.

**His first** strike in the 63rd minute was controversially ruled out for offside, but two minutes later, the new recruit reacted to Stefan Mauk's mishit effort to smash Brisbane's equaliser into the top right corner.

**In the** end, it was a positive start for Taggart and Aloisi will hope it is the start of Taggart becoming Roar's main man this season.

## Glory and Wanderers need time

**It was** built up as one of the round's more intriguing clashes as new Perth Glory coach Tony Popovic faced down his old club, Western Sydney Wanderers.

**By the** time the final whistle went though, it was clear how far these two are from being the finished article under their respective new managers.

**Glory were** the better side in the first half and deserved their halftime lead, with Popovic's new players buying into his insistence to always play out from the back.

**This worked** in the first half as the Wanderers were happy to sit back and absorb pressure, but a pep talk from WSW's new coach Markus Babel at halftime clearly worked.

**Wanderers showed** much more endeavour to press high in the second half, grab an equaliser and prevent Perth from playing through them with the same ease shown in the first half. But for all that, it appeared the German was happy to settle for a point.

**Popovic's seems** to have his side playing his way, but they don't seem capable of doing it for 90 minutes at the moment and Babel still looks unsure about what the best system is for his team...and a side which ran out of steam short of 90 minutes.