

A-LEAGUE COACH RADAR: TOP 10 AUSSIE NPL/OS TARGETS

Is it the “Rudan Effect”? Maybe. But finally, there seems a genuine appetite to give Australian coaches from the NPL a chance in dugouts across the A-League.

Mark Rudan has made the transition seamlessly, transforming Phoenix into a well-drilled and attacking force in the A-League after his spell in the NPL.

And new A-League club Western Melbourne has given John Anastasiadis, from NPL VIC powerhouse Bentleigh Greens, a role as an assistant.

Anastasiadis has toiled for years. Like many in the NPL, they really want it. Some have even moved from the NPL scene to overseas to further their careers.

We reckon there are more Rudans out there who would give their right arm for a chance in a pro environment.

Here are 10 we reckon should be looked at for the A-League as head coaches or assistants.

Abbas Saad

The six times capped Socceroo was the man behind Sydney Olympic's historic NPL NSW league and Grand Final double in 2018.

He was appointed right before the season kicked off and without having a pre-season, he came to the aid of a club where he became a star in the 80s and 90s.

He may not have spent much time in the country in recent decades, but that makes him even more valuable to an A-League club.

Saad is a huge star in Asia - particularly in the booming south-east Asia region - where he is revered for winning league and cup titles in Malaysia and in Singapore.

Saad has also worked as a TV pundit for many years across the region where he has a much bigger profile than here. Proof of that was in his guest appearance at Singapore NT training in October before their 2018 Suzuki Cup campaign.

His career is unique, spanning Asia and Australia and was highly-rated, Terry Venables picked him for the Socceroos in the 1990s.

His coaching CV prior to Olympic was a little patchy, Penrith Nepean United a decade ago, Technical Youth Director at Olympic and head coach of the Australian Deaf Football Team, as well as some coaching experience in Malaysia.

But the 51-year-old was an instant success in the NPL last year with Olympic.

And for A-League clubs, his ability to scout and attract the best talent in south-east Asia would be a huge boon right now.

While in Singapore he identified Lions' rising star Shakir Hamzah as a defender who could step up in the A-League. Saad told FTBL recently: “Obviously the tactical side is one thing, but it's the confidence and belief that I've given the players.

«Coaching, a lot of it is man management. I know that being a former player it's about how you are managed and how you can get the best out of the player.”

Karl Dodd

An outstanding candidate who is rightly being talked about for the vacant Roar role. Dodd ticks all the boxes: played A-League (Roar, Kingz) has NPL experience in coaching and playing and has played overseas in Scotland. He's currently a national team coach in Guam, which has accelerated his coach-learning trajectory. And as for Roar, he's a proud Queenslander who understands the football culture in the Sunshine State. His time will come.

Scott Miller

Miller is back home on Melbourne's Mornington Peninsula



with his own academy and head coach at local NPL outfit Langwarrin. Surely one of the most qualified at NPL 2 East level, Miller has A-League experience with Newcastle Jets, overseas experience (Fulham and in Denmark) and has even worked with the Socceroos under Ange. Surely his time will come again. A rare gem at NPL level.

Mark Crittenden

If you were excited by NSW NPL club Blacktown Demons' run in the FFA Cup in recent seasons, then the name Mark Crittenden should be familiar to you. He's another very talented coach who deserves the chance to show what he can do in the A-League. He actually started coaching aged 16. He's had over 22 years experience in senior coaching, winning multiple NPL championships, a Premiership, and an FFA NPL Champions trophy in 2015. And with an FFA Cup last eight finish twice and two round of 32 appearances, how can his name not be mentioned? Currently the Demons' head of football.

Damian Mori

Mori was an absolute freak of a striker. He smashed the goal-scoring records in the NSL and is one of the few who also played and starred in both the NSL and A-League, and Borussia Moenchengladbach signed him in the 1990s. The former Socceroo, 49, has been quietly building his case over recent years in SA where he's been successful with Adelaide City. He was in the frame for the Phoenix position and at Glory. Surely he's worth a shot? Even as an assistant.

Ruben Zadkovich

An ideal assistant coach in the A-League, Zadkovich has taken to coaching like a duck to water. He's already won the Northern NSW NPL with Broadmeadow Magic and by all accounts is revelling in his new role after injury curtailed the now 32-year-old's A-League career. At his age, the one-time Socceroo and Olyroo would be an asset on the training track at any club right now.

Luke Wilkshire

Similar to Zadkovich, Wilkshire is young and just beginning his coaching journey. He is back on home soil in Wollongong learning the ropes of the coaching game, but with the experience he's amassed over the years in the club and international arena, he's surely bound for the A-League. Would be ideal if Wollongong/South Coast ever make it into the A-League or an A2 second division.

John Hutchinson

He got a taste of coaching for a short while after he retired as a Mariners legend two years ago. Since then, he's been in the MLS system, coaching Seattle's second side in the USL. A fabulous grounding as a coach and we'd love to see that experience brought back to the A-League one day.

Gary Phillips

The coach with the most rounded CV, Phillips retired as a player 20 years ago after over a decade in the midfield of Sydney Olympic. He also played almost 100 games with Brisbane Strikers. After a spell with the QAS to kickstart his coaching career, he went on to win a title with Olympic before an odyssey that took in Tonga, Vietnam, PNG (women), Philippines, Malaysia plus the AFC. With his resume, he could coach W-League or A-League with all the knowledge and experience he's gained.

John Gibson

“Gibbo” has been busy building an excellent reputation as a coach in WA. He's often mentioned as a mentor for many top talents in the state and Glory set up. The former Olyroo who was a gritty midfielder in the NSL has enormous potential and has amassed much experience around the WA football scene and with Glory's youth system, NPL sides, and women's programs.