



Tratt: 'I wouldn't be here without them'

Late-blooming Sydney FC star Jacob Tratt took a moment to thank his girlfriend and family for their support, after scoring the winner in the Sky Blues' 2-1 win over Adelaide United.

Tratt originally played for Sydney FC as a youth, winning the 2014 Youth League title as captain, before having to move elsewhere to find professional opportunities.

In between spells at the Sutherland Sharks, the 24-year-old played a season for Wellington Phoenix. As he grew older, it appeared unlikely that Tratt would forge an enduring A-League career - but his determination and work rate paid off.

Now, after scoring in the Sydney derby on his debut for the Sky Blues, the free-roaming defender has added a winner against Adelaide in his first start for his boyhood club.

"We're thankful for Redders (Andrew Redmayne), he saved us," Tratt said. "Happy days. It's a very important match considering they were only a few points from the top of the table.

"I got another header so I'm pretty stoked. I just want to say thanks to my family and my girlfriend because I wouldn't be here without them."

After Sydney raced to a two-goal lead against the Reds - the first goal a pearler of a free-kick from Siem de Jong - Adelaide managed to claw one back after George Blackwood earned Craig Goodwin a penalty.

The fringe Socceroo converted to bring his season's goal tally to six, but despite a late surge requiring a brilliant save from Redmayne, the Reds looked second best.

"It's disappointing after last week but it got made really hard for us at the start," Goodwin said.

"The referee gives a foul when it should have been our ball and then it was an unbelievable free kick.

"We made it difficult for ourselves, but we need to put it in the back of our minds, there are still a lot of points to play for.

"We created some good chances, the crossing wasn't so good, but we get lucky with a goal disallowed for them, then unlucky with Redmayne's brilliant save.

"We just didn't have that little bit of quality and we made it hard for ourselves."

WE HAVE TO TALK ABOUT OCEANIA...

Australia may be struggling at the Asian Cup right now, but that's why we joined Asia - to get strong, regular competition that would force us to grow as a footballing nation.

The game is certainly growing in Australia, on any measure, but what about those we left behind?



In every sense, Oceania is a basket case. One of the least economically developed regions in the world, Oceania as a footballing confederation is a pointless embarrassment.

Australia, the only nation with a professional football league (and by far the richest country in the region) got out as soon as it could, leaving the yoke on New Zealand's narrow shoulders (and even they drop points against the might of Solomon Islands and PNG).

New Zealand has, at least, benefited from the arrangement by getting an easier pathway to the World Cup Finals, but without regular competitive matches against decent opposition they will never grow into the sort of footballing nation able to make a dent when they get there.

To a large extent that, to my mind, justifies the place of Wellington in the A-League. We have a responsibility to keep football alive in the Confederation we abandoned, and indeed I'd take it further. As the A-League expands and acquires a second (and one day a third) division, why shouldn't there be an Auckland team to create an NZ derby?

I'd take it even further and suggest that, while a team representing other Pacific nations is impossible (without FIFA largesse), there could be incentive for A-League clubs to have Islanders on their books. Something like a 3 + 1 + 1 arrangement.

Most importantly, I'd suggest that Oceania, by itself, is too weak to continue. If I were king of FIFA I'd be rolling up Oceania into Asia and splitting Asia into East and West.

The line could be drawn somewhere around India, depending on a range of issues for negotiation - not least the division of World Cup places.

Bearing in mind that the World Cup Finals are increasing from 32 to 48 teams from 2026 (and maybe 2022 depending on negotiations in March), Asia will have eight places at the World Cup. Oceania will have one.

Logically that suggests a split of five and four, although I would prefer 5.5 (East) and 3.5 (West) given FIFA rankings and traditional appearances at the WCF. Those have been dominated in the last four tournaments by Japan, South Korea and Australia with Saudi Arabia and Iran usually trading places for the other spot.

New Zealand might have to be convinced, now that they are all but guaranteed to play at every World Cup Finals going forward, but the opportunity to join Asia (including the Asian Champions League) should be a major enticement and they'd still be a fair chance with the likes of China, Thailand, North Korea and American Samoa to take one of the 5.5 places.

Clearly, this is one enormous thought bubble, but to my mind it has a lot of merit - especially for the Oceania nations, most of whom have never played anyone better than the Kiwis (or Australia).

Inviting them into the wider football world would have to give football a kick along in the region, which ultimately might also be good for us.

Adrian's latest book *The Fighting Man* is in the shops right now or available through Booktopia. Adrian also wrote *Mr Cleansheets*.