



By George Stavroulakis

Sydney United 58 prepare for life after Nikas

-By Nick Houghton

A new signing who will never take the field could prove to be Sydney United 58's best offseason acquisition.



Miro Vlastelica returns as United 58 head coach for his first preseason in charge and his recruitment of former Socceroos high performance coach Craig Duncan to the club's coaching staff could turn out to be a masterstroke.

Duncan, who was a key cog in Ange Postecoglou's Socceroos coaching setup and recently was involved with Iran's squad for the 2019 Asian Cup, has set out to make United 58 the fittest, strongest and, most importantly, healthiest club in the NSW NPL competition.

"We're lucky to have Craig on board and I think having a fitness expert like him involved with the squad is something other teams will definitely look to adopt themselves," Vlastelica said.

"Preventing injuries is for the club the most important thing. We want our boys

on the pitch and not in the stands as it is an expensive exercise for the club and a difficult time for the player.

"I look at the way we finished up last season and we had five of our starters sitting in the grand stand for our semi-final.

"It is stuff like that which we are hoping to change by having Craig come in and hopefully that gives us a little bit of an advantage over our opposition."

United 58 midfield veteran Nick Stavroulakis will lead the side in 2019 but he will be without long time teammate and close friend Panny Nikas for this campaign.

Nikas, a former NPL NSW Men's Player of the Year winner, made a blockbuster move to Rockdale at the end of last season and the loss of his output in attack has only been compounded by the departure of experienced striker Chris Payne to APIA.

However, it hasn't just been outgoing's from Edensor Park with the Reds signing former Central Coast Mariners Australian Youth international defender Liam Rose, ex-Wollongong Wolves striker Peter Simonoski, Talented winger Judah Cluer and former star Uruguayan youth international Sebastian Gallegos.

Gallegos in particular will be a player to look out for especially. The 27-year-old rose to fame at the 2009 U17 FIFA World Cup when he shared the Golden Boot award with three other players on five goals.

Vlastelica admitted the loss of both Payne and Nikas would be felt but said it provided an opportunity for a number of players, both new and established, to make their mark.

"It's never good to lose players like Panny (Nikas) and Chris (Payne) but that is just

the nature of football," he said.

"I'm really happy with the business we have done this offseason and bringing in players with a high pedigree.

"I have been really happy with what I have seen so far and it is only very early into the offseason."

After a relative lean spell by their lofty standards, Sydney United 58 will be determined to make this season the year they return the NPL NSW Premiership trophy back to halls of the BOKA stand.

Key player movements

Departures: Panny Nikas (Rockdale City Suns), Chris Payne (APIA Leichhardt Tigers)

Incoming: Sebastian Gallegos (Hawkesbury City NPL3), Liam Rose (Central Coast Mariners), Peter Simonovski (Wollongong Wolves), Judah Cluer (Marconi Stallions)

JETS TO FACE JAKARTA CLUB



Newcastle Jets will face Indonesia club Persija Jakarta on February 12 to keep their bid for Asian Champions League qualification alive.

The Jets will host the Liga 1 winners at McDonald Jones Stadium next week in the preliminary round 2.

If they win, they will proceed to play against last year's Asian Champions League winners Kashima Antlers on February 19 for a spot in the group stage.

Newcastle will be placed in Group E along with Gyeongnam FC, Johor Darul Ta'zim and Playoff Spot 2 Winner (China/Thailand/Vietnam) if they win both playoffs.

Brazilian winger Jair has been left out of the Asian Champions League squad due to visa player restrictions.

Joey Champness isn't in the squad for the play-off phase of the competition, because of injury, but should the club progress to the Group Stage he will be in the mix.

"We've picked a strong core of players with a good mix of experience and youth," Jets coach Ernie Merrick said.

"There are a couple in there who have played in the Asian Champions League before like Nikolai [Topor-Stanley] and Nigel [Boogaard], and their understanding of the Asian football landscape will be crucial to our chances.

"It's a fantastic opportunity for our players to showcase their skills on the big stage, and the boys are really keen to play Champions League.

"It's an honour for the club to have the opportunity to qualify, we're extremely focused on the task at hand and looking forward to challenge."

A LEAGUE Results 17 ROUND

5 games, 23 goals: An A-League round to remember

- Sydney FC - Melbourne City 2-0
- Perth Glory - Wellington Phoenix 3-0
- Adelaide United - Brisbane Roar 4-3
- Central Coast Mariners - Melbourne Victory 2-3
- WS Wanderers - Newcastle Jets 1-1



A - LEAGUE Table 17 Round

	Team	GP	Pts	W	D	L	GF	GA	+/-
1	Perth Glory	17	40	12	4	1	36	16	20
2	Melbourne Victory	17	36	11	3	3	39	21	18
3	Sydney FC	17	35	11	2	4	31	19	12
4	Adelaide United	17	29	8	5	4	25	20	5
5	Melbourne City	17	27	8	3	6	21	18	3
6	Wellington Phoenix	17	26	7	5	5	24	24	0
7	Newcastle Jets	17	18	5	3	9	20	23	-3
8	WS Wanderers	17	10	2	4	11	24	40	-16
9	Brisbane Roar	17	9	1	6	10	21	38	-17
10	Central Coast Mariners	17	6	1	3	13	18	40	-22

A-LEAGUE 18 ROUND

DATE	HOME	AWAY	VENUE	Kick-Off (AEDT)
Friday, 15 February 2019	Newcastle Jets	Melbourne City FC	McDonald Jones Stadium	7:50PM
Saturday, 16 February 2019	Wellington Phoenix	Melbourne Victory	TBC	5:35PM
Saturday, 16 February 2019	Adelaide United	Western Sydney Wanderers FC	Coopers Stadium	7:50PM
Saturday, 16 February 2019	Perth Glory	Brisbane Roar FC	nib Stadium	10:00PM
Sunday, 17 February 2019	Sydney FC	Central Coast Mariners	Leichhardt Oval	5:00PM