



SYDNEY FC READY TO TACKLE NPL NSW MEN'S SEASON

Youthful exuberance and a desire to take it to the competition's top teams is sure to power Sydney FC during the 2019 NPL NSW Men's top tier competition

It is the club's third season in the NSW state league top flight and they will be determined to prove their place in the NPL once again. **Made up** of players aged 21-years and under from the Sydney FC A-League academy, the Young Sky Blues stand out as a unique prospect among the league's other 11 sides. **Coached by** Jimmy van Weeren, Sydney FC is unashamedly focused on the development of players instead of winning the title. **But the** young coach insists that doesn't mean his side will be walkovers. **"Obviously we** are in a unique situation compared to our opponents but we are no less competitive," van Weeren said. **"This is** a good group of players who are going to take the game to whoever they play. **"All the** boys have a lot to play for and I know if we apply ourselves we could catch a few teams by surprise." **Van Weeren** will have an almost all new squad to work with this year with the players turning 22 in 2019 moving on from the side. **Gone are** regulars from last campaign such as Duro Dragicevic, Sam McIllhatton and Jeremy Cox. **However, van** Weeren is not short of quality in his squad with Liam McGing, Tom Heward-Belle, and Jordi Swibel just some of the players at the young coach's disposal. **"It is** an interesting challenge trying to mold a new group of players year to year but we are really happy with how the side is shaping up. **"There is** naturally going to be a few teething issues throughout the season but I have a lot of confidence in what these boys can do." **One player** sure to be an x-factor this season is 18-year-old attacker Luke Ivanovic who has already broken through to Sydney FC's A-League side and scored in their win against Melbourne City. **"There are** some special players in this group who on their day can be a real handful," van Weeren said. **"Luke has** had some great performances for the first team and really showed his class. **"Hopefully he** will be able to continue his development throughout the NPL season. **Sydney FC** finished the 2018 season in last position but survived relegation thanks to their superior record in the Club Championship. **They will** be desperate to not finish with the wooden spoon again in 2019. **The Young** Sky Blues open their campaign on March 10 with an Eastern Suburbs derby of sorts against Hakoah Sydney City East at Hensley Athletic Field. **Key Player** movements **Arrivals:** Marco Tilio, Joel King, Hamish Lamberton, Ben Koop, Daniel Blachura **Departures:** Duro Dragicevic, Jeremy Cox, Sam McIllhatton, Jordan Mutch

NEW BOYS ON THE BLOCK MT DRUITT TOWN RANGERS READY FOR NEW ADVENTURE

Competition new boys Mt Drutt Town Rangers are not just making up the numbers in the National Premier Leagues NSW Men's competition.

That's the message from head coach Aidan Desmond who believes his team can challenge the competition's favourites and even be a finals contender. **The Rangers** romped to the 2018 NPL 2 NSW Men's Premiership finishing 16 points ahead of their nearest rival.

However, it won't be that easy this season as they make up a step up in class to the NPL NSW Men's top tier competition.

"We've worked on a style of football which would help us achieve long term success not just winning NPL 2," Desmond said.

"We want to play a good attacking brand of football and win games.

"All the players have been working tirelessly in the off-season and I know they will give everything on the pitch throughout the season to help us achieve our goals."

Mt Drutt boast a strong squad across the board and features a number of experienced NPL stars sure to carry the load.

Veteran NPL Victoria midfielder Blake Thompson is expected to hold down the midfield for Desmond's side after signing from Bentleigh Greens.

Joining him will be mercurial midfielder Toufic Alameddine who has made the move west from Rockdale City Suns.

Former Sutherland duo Adrian Vranic and Felipe Zapata will provide both youth and enthusiasm for Desmond upfront and in the middle of the park.

The club has also brought in Uruguayan striker Fabrizio Fernandez who will carry a lot of the goal scoring workload this campaign.

Desmond indicated he was happy with his off-season recruitment saying he believes his mix of local youth and experienced veterans

would be the perfect mix.

"We have retained quite a number of players from our NPL 2 season as well as promoting from the club's youth side," he said.

"The players we have brought in we wanted to be tried and tested at this level which I feel we have done.

"It is a good group of players who I think have a great mentality to go alongside their obvious talent."

One player returning from last season is shot stopper Carlos Saliadarré who is no stranger to the NPL NSW top tier competition.

Saliadarré was Blacktown Spartans' captain for many seasons during their

time in the NSW top flight and will be determined to make his second stint in the competition a successful one.

While club captain Mathew Clowes will also be ready to go at the Rangers' spiritual ground, namely Popondetta Park.

While the club enters the final stages of the preseason preparations, Desmond said there is big expectations in what is set to be a historic year for the Rangers.

"Earning promotion to NPL 1 is the culmination of a long term project at the club and now the responsibility is on us to make the most of this chance," he said.

"Everyone we have signed is here to win and achieve success.

"It is a long season and there is going to be a bit of a learning curve for us but I know everyone will be giving it everything for the shirt all season long."

Mt Drutt Rangers open their season with a trip to staunch local rivals Blacktown City in what promises to be a cracker of a match on Sunday March 10.

Key player movements

Arrivals: Blake Thompson (Bentleigh Greens), Toufic Alameddine (Rockdale), Adrian Vranic (Sutherland Sharks), Felipe Zapata (Sutherland), Fabrizio Fernandez (Uruguay)

