

nsw



By George Stavroulakis

# SYDNEY BREAK CHAMPIONSHIP DROUGHT

**It's been six years since Sydney FC last held the W-League Championship trophy aloft.**

**After three** Grand Finals in four seasons, Sydney have done so once again, defeating Perth Glory 4-2 at Jubilee Stadium.

**It was** the game Sydney had been building towards all season.

**On paper,** the Sky Blues are stacked with international superstars, but many – including the players themselves – didn't think they had reached their potential this season.

**This was** the game in which they did so.

**With the** incomparable Sam Kerr leading Glory out for the shot at their first ever trophy, Sydney had to put in the performance of the season, and they didn't disappoint.

**It was** the home team that came out firing. Within two minutes, young winger Princess Ibini had cut past two Perth defenders and charged into the box. Her cut-back was collected by American star Savannah McCaskill whose shot rocketed off the crossbar.

**Sydney's strong** start resulted in the first goal of the half not long afterwards, as McCaskill collected a pass at the top of the box and passed out to the right where her American compatriot Sofia Huerta was waiting in space. One touch, two touches, then bang – a rocket into the top right corner.

**The record** 6,127-strong Sydney crowd went absolutely bonkers for the right back's fourth goal of the season.

**Ibini continued** to be threatening down the left-hand side, making several strong runs past her markets to the by-line, but Perth's central defence remained solid and cleared majority of the following balls into the area.

**However, Perth** are not known for giving up after going behind, and they soon settled into the opening period of the match.

**Matilda Sam** Kerr had the Glory's first real chance on goal in the 11th minute, heading a corner kick just wide. Several minutes later, Perth were at it again, but this time it was due to Sydney's errors. Some scrappy defending in and around the box found Mautz, but again, her shot went just wide.

**The game** began to open up as Perth grew comfortable, with the visitor's first goal coming in the 22nd minute after Kerr was tripped by Sydney's Danielle Colaprico in the box. Despite getting a strong hand to it, Kerr's penalty – her 17th goal of the season – was perfectly placed in the bottom left corner. 1-1.

**The game** died down slightly over the following fifteen minutes, with neither team making any serious attempts on goal.

**Sydney began** to exert their pressure throughout the closing stages of the second half. Princess Ibini continued to threaten down the left, while McCaskill and fellow American Colaprico fighting hard in the middle of the park to win scrappy challenges and keep possession.

**Sydney's second** goal came in the 41st minute thanks to a bit of quick thinking by McCaskill, who leaped up to connect with a perfectly-weighted cross from Caitlin Foord, her header floating over Campbell and into the net. 2-1.

**The game** opened up in the closing minutes of the half, with big chances at both ends, but the teams went into the sheds with Sydney ahead.

**Despite the** lead, the feeling in the crowd was that the game was nowhere close to over and from the start of the second half, it was clear Sydney wasn't ready to settle.

**Within the** first minute, Huerta was again on the attack, sending in a deep cross for Ibini who was charging in from the left, but it was headed away.

**Sydney continued** to dominate possession as they did in the first half, suffocating Perth's midfield and ensuring the Glory's most potent attackers – Kerr and Rachel Hill – were kept isolated.

**Sydney's pressure** continued to pay off around ten minutes into the second half as Ibini once again cut inside her defender and charged at goal, but her on-target shot was well saved by a horizontal, diving Campbell.

**A minute** later, it was Perth's turn. Kerr received a pass from Hill near the top of the box, turning to shoot but Bledsoe dived down well to keep the scores at 2-1.

**The game's** third goal came in the 61st minute, as Perth's fatigue from a 120 minute semi-final and two long-distance trips started to wear in. A poor clearance from a corner saw the ball spin backwards towards Perth's goal, and McCaskill pounced, turning her defender and shooting low and hard across Campbell and into the net.

**However, it's** become almost part and parcel of Perth this season that they continue to find ways back into games. In the 67th minute, a Nikki Stanton corner was chipped in by her Chicago Red Stars team-mate Alyssa Mautz, bringing the score to 3-2.

**The Sky** Blues wouldn't be taking that for an answer. Five minutes later, they restored their two-goal lead. McCaskill's deep cross was poorly deflected right into the path of Matilda Chloe Logarzo, whose first-time shot was too hard for Campbell to stop. 4-2.

**The game** was far more open in the closing 25 minutes as Perth continued to push, with both Hill and Kerr trying hard to create opportunities. But Sydney's defence remained firm, with both Alanna Kennedy and her centre-half teammate Liz Ralston turning out their best performances of the season.

**Kerr, in** particular, continued to work hard down the right side of the field, creating openings for her team-mates, charging at and past defenders, and sending dangerous balls into the area. But Sydney remained solid.

**It was** ultimately this defensive solidity that allowed Sydney to see the result through to the end.

**Glory head** coach Bobby Despotovski complimented Sydney's players and the team's tactical nous all over the park.

**He also** acknowledged that fatigue and extensive travel over the past week may have played a role in Perth's performance, as the players looked sluggish and slow, particularly in the first half, and couldn't find their way back into the game after going behind 2-1.

**Sydney coach** Ante Juric, on the other hand, was absolutely thrilled with his team's performance. "Very proud of the [players], they were sensational," he said.

"It was probably the best game we've played.



**Juric was** particularly complimentary of his defence.

"**With Sam** Kerr and Hill, they keep getting patches where they attack and they're dangerous, so I thought Alanna Kennedy and Liz Ralston – and the whole back four – were sensational," he said.

**However, it's** difficult to look past those goals – one each for Huerta and Logarzo, and a brace for Player of the Match Savannah McCaskill, who Juric particularly praised.

"**Big players** step up and she's been huge the

whole year," Juric said.

"**She's a** world-class player, not just a good player – a world class player. I'm surprised she's not in the national team but I have no doubt she'll get there, she's still so young."

**It was** a fitting Grand Final for what was the closest W-League season in history: two star-studded teams, a bunch of amazing goals, and some fantastic football across the full 90 minutes of play. What next season holds, only time will tell.

## A LEAGUE Results 19 ROUND

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



### A - LEAGUE Table 19 Round

|    | Team                   | GP | Pts | W  | D | L  | GF | GA | +/- |
|----|------------------------|----|-----|----|---|----|----|----|-----|
| 1  | Perth Glory            | 19 | 46  | 14 | 4 | 1  | 42 | 17 | 25  |
| 2  | Melbourne Victory      | 19 | 37  | 11 | 4 | 4  | 41 | 24 | 17  |
| 3  | Sydney FC              | 19 | 36  | 11 | 3 | 5  | 33 | 22 | 11  |
| 4  | Adelaide United        | 19 | 30  | 8  | 6 | 5  | 27 | 24 | 3   |
| 5  | Melbourne City         | 19 | 28  | 8  | 4 | 7  | 23 | 22 | 1   |
| 6  | Wellington Phoenix     | 19 | 28  | 7  | 7 | 5  | 26 | 26 | 0   |
| 7  | Newcastle Jets         | 19 | 22  | 6  | 4 | 9  | 24 | 25 | -1  |
| 8  | WS Wanderers           | 19 | 16  | 4  | 4 | 11 | 29 | 41 | -12 |
| 9  | Brisbane Roar          | 19 | 12  | 2  | 6 | 11 | 23 | 43 | -20 |
| 10 | Central Coast Mariners | 19 | 7   | 1  | 4 | 14 | 19 | 43 | -24 |

### A - LEAGUE 20 ROUND

| DATE                       | HOME                        | AWAY              | VENUE                  | Kick-Off (AEDT) |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------|
| Friday, 22 February 2019   | Central Coast Mariners      | Brisbane Roar FC  | Central Coast Stadium  | 7:50PM          |
| Saturday, 23 February 2019 | Wellington Phoenix          | Sydney FC         | TBC                    | 5:35PM          |
| Saturday, 23 February 2019 | Melbourne Victory           | Melbourne City FC | Marvel Stadium         | 7:50PM          |
| Sunday, 24 February 2019   | Newcastle Jets              | Adelaide United   | McDonald Jones Stadium | 5:00PM          |
| Sunday, 24 February 2019   | Western Sydney Wanderers FC | Perth Glory       | Spotless Stadium       | 7:00PM          |