

nsw



By George Stavroulakis

'DEEP DOWN THEY'LL RESPECT': POPOVIC UNCERTAIN ON WANDERERS' RECEPTION

Tony Popovic is staring down the barrel of his first return to Wanderland. But it's a far cry from the theme park he left behind...

While many Wanderers fans still harbour resentment against Popovic for leaving the club shortly before their 2017/18 season began, Popovic isn't fussed. The former Wanderers icon laughed off uncertainties regarding his reception against Western Sydney Wanderers tomorrow night.

"You don't know with fans what the reaction will be but whatever it is I'm sure deep down they'll respect the time we had together and how they'll show that, that'll be up to them," Popovic said.

"It'd be a bit different if it was the old Parramatta Stadium, at Spotless I'm sure it will be a different feeling personally but also a special one.

"[I have] fantastic memories from my time there, I still have a lot of friends there and I'm sure I'll see them before and after, during the game it's business as usual. We want the three points."

He'll arrive at a far sparser, more hollow version of Wanderland than the rambunctious, diehard atmosphere he left

behind.

The much-maligned Spotless Stadium, a team languishing in eighth place in the table and a vastly reduced crowd fail to strike the same fear into the hearts of A-League coaches they once did.

But while the Wanderers have endured their toughest A-League season under Markus Babbel, there are glimmers of hope.

Back-to-back wins have bought the German legend a brief reprieve, while a narrow 3-2 loss - in which Western Sydney lead 2-0 - to Perth last time out will lend a little extra confidence, should the Wanderers require it.

Nevertheless, it will be a different kind to Popa's confidence.

A phenomenal squad and backing from Perth's board and a growing atmosphere of their own, not to mention nine points clear at the top of the table, has left the former Socceroo feeling pretty peachy about his career decisions so far.



"We can't deny we're on top, we're on top for a reason," he said. «We deserve to be there and if the conversation is about us being on top that's a good thing.

"It's a good place to be, obviously we want to stay there and if we deserve to be there when Round 27 is completed we'll be the Premiers."

MARRONE: 'IT WAS MESSY'



Celebrating his 200th A-League appearance in a semblance of style, Michael Marrone had little to say about Adelaide United's 0-0 draw with Newcastle Jets.

The Reds should have taken the lead in a drab affair through Craig Goodwin, who rocketed a powerful shot against the crossbar before the stroke of half-time.

But Marrone acknowledged a scoreless draw was a fair result - Adelaide were particularly willing to kill the contest through staunch defending.

"It's still a point and to be fair the match was pretty messy, a point is fair," Marrone said.

"We hit the bar and a few other half chances, we didn't create much with the

ball though - it was all on the counter.

"Playing an unfamiliar role is always hard, but to keep a clean sheet is always nice."

Counterpart Jets centre-half Nikolai Topor-Stanley had more reason to be upset - two points dropped against fourth-placed Adelaide leaves them well-adrift of sixth place and finals football.

But even the rambunctious defender could argue little with both teams' tepid performances.

"Draw is fair in the end but we still had chances to win it, a few tired legs but we'll keep going," Topor-Stanley said.

"We never use the Asian Champions League as an excuse, but obviously it plays its role. We've always believed in finals football, and we still do."

A LEAGUE Results 20 ROUND

WS Wanderers - Perth Glory 1-1
Newcastle Jets - Adelaide United 0-0
Melbourne Victory - Melbourne City 1-1
Wellington Phoenix - Sydney FC 0-1
Central Coast Mariners - Brisbane Roar 3-5



HYUNDAI
A-LEAGUE

A - LEAGUE Table 20 Round

| | Team | GP | Pts | W | D | L | GF | GA | +/- |
|----|------------------------|----|-----|----|---|----|----|----|-----|
| 1 | Perth Glory | 20 | 47 | 14 | 5 | 1 | 43 | 18 | 25 |
| 2 | Sydney FC | 20 | 39 | 12 | 3 | 5 | 34 | 22 | 12 |
| 3 | Melbourne Victory | 20 | 38 | 11 | 5 | 4 | 42 | 25 | 17 |
| 4 | Adelaide United | 20 | 31 | 8 | 7 | 5 | 27 | 24 | 3 |
| 5 | Melbourne City | 20 | 29 | 8 | 5 | 7 | 24 | 23 | 1 |
| 6 | Wellington Phoenix | 20 | 28 | 7 | 7 | 6 | 26 | 27 | -1 |
| 7 | Newcastle Jets | 20 | 23 | 6 | 5 | 9 | 24 | 25 | -1 |
| 8 | WS Wanderers | 20 | 17 | 4 | 5 | 11 | 30 | 42 | -12 |
| 9 | Brisbane Roar | 20 | 15 | 3 | 6 | 11 | 28 | 46 | -18 |
| 10 | Central Coast Mariners | 20 | 7 | 1 | 4 | 15 | 22 | 48 | -26 |

A-LEAGUE 21 Round (split round)

| DATE | HOME | AWAY | VENUE | Kick-Off (AEDT) |
|---------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Friday, 1 March 2019 | Sydney FC | Adelaide United | Leichhardt Oval | 7:50PM Saturday, 2 March 2019 |
| Saturday, 19 January 2019 | Sydney FC | Newcastle Jets | Jubilee Stadium | 5:35PM |
| Saturday, 19 January 2019 | Melbourne City FC | Perth Glory | AAMI Park | 7:50PM |
| Sunday, 20 January 2019 | Melbourne Victory | Wellington Phoenix | AAMI Park | 5:00PM |
| Sunday, 20 January 2019 | Central Coast Mariners | Brisbane Roar FC | Central Coast Stadium | 7:00PM |