



By George Stavroulakis

→ NATIONAL PREMIER LEAGUES 3 NSW MEN'S The high flying Stanmore Hawks

The party rolls on for the high flying Stanmore Hawks after they consolidated their position at the top of the National Premier Leagues 3 NSW Men's table. Stanmore Hawks and Western NSW Mariners enjoyed thrilling 4-3 victories in their respective fixtures as Hawks strengthened their grip on first place while Western's triumph has put them on equal point with second last Parramatta. Parramatta succumbed to a 1-0 defeat against Bankstown City at Melita Stadium; Dulwich Hill and Granville Rage drew 2-2 at Arlington Oval; Stanmore Hawks preserved their position as league leaders as they overcame SD Raiders 4-3 at Ernie Smith Reserve; Bankstown United suffered a 4-1 defeat to Dunbar Rovers at Jensen Park; Western NSW Mariners fought until the final whistle in their encounter with Sydney University as they recorded a 4-3 win at Sydney University Football Ground while Gladesville Ryde Magic put four unanswered goals past Hawkesbury City at Christie Park. Football NSW stepped outside of the office at Valentine Sports Park on Saturday night to witness the clash between Inter Lions and Camden Tigers.

SD Raiders FC – Stanmore Hawks FC 3-4

The top of the table clash saw a 10-man Stanmore Hawks side hold on to record a crucial 4-3 victory away to SD Raiders at Ernie Smith Reserve on Saturday night. Stanmore opened the scoring just after the 10-minute mark thanks to a penalty which was converted by Jovan Blagojevic after a Raiders player handballed Nathan Niski's ball into the box.

The visitors doubled their lead just before the 25th minute mark as Peter Yannopoulos slotted the ball past Raiders' goalkeeper Michael Rutherford after he was expertly picked out by Alberto Perea Henche's missile of a through ball.

Raiders reduced the deficit with five minutes left to run in the first half as a well worked corner routine reaped its rewards.

Yannopoulos scored his second and his side's third of the night just before the interval after he finished off a fluid attacking move which began with left back Angus Chance.

Chance played through Blagojevic on the left-hand touchline before the striker's cross found Yannopoulos free at the back post.

The hosts made it 3-2 midway through the second half after Daniel Bittar strike whistled into the top right-hand corner of the net after he was the first to act on the loose ball in Stanmore's 18-yard area.

Hawks restored their two-goal lead just under 10 minutes later as Sam Awad flicked

home Perea Henche's corner at the front post.

The home side did not roll over despite the score line and they made it 4-3 after they cut through Stanmore's defence before Anthony Proia lobbed it over Nick Carosi.

A second booking for Hawks' Timothy Wohlfiel in the closing exchanges made for a nervy finish with the visitors forced to deal with a barrage of shots from their opponents with luck on their side after Proia had a goal disallowed for offside in what was virtually the last kick of the game.

Gladesville Ryde Magic – Hawkesbury City FC 4-0

Gladesville Ryde Magic registered a comprehensive 4-0 victory from their encounter against Hawkesbury City at Christie Park on Sunday afternoon.

All four of Magic's goals arrived in the second half as they steamrolled the opposition while also significantly boosting their goal difference along the way.

Chris Triantis and Peter Voukidis scored within five minutes of the restart to give their side a healthy lead.

Magic completed the scoring in the final 15 minutes of the contest with a Chris Gaitatzis strike on the 77th minute mark before Christos Tomaras found the back of the net two minutes later to complete the scoring for the afternoon.

MUSCAT APOLOGISES FOR VICTORY HUMILIATION

Melbourne Victory coach Kevin Muscat has apologised for his side's display in the 6-1 loss to Sydney FC in the A-League semi-final.

Melbourne Victory's reputation as a team for the big occasions is in tatters after Sunday's 6-1 capitulation to Sydney FC in the A-League semi-final at Kogarah's Jubilee Oval.

And for the moment at least, their leaders aren't sure how to deal with the foreign feeling.

Perhaps that's because coach Kevin Muscat and retiring skipper Carl Valeri were as surprised by the showing as everyone else.

Victory were supposed to be feared, particularly after monstrosity through the finals series - and Sydney FC - to win the title from fourth place last year.

"We had a very off night," Muscat said.

"Unfortunately for us, in sport you have your highs and today was certainly a low.

"I apologise to our members and fans personally.

"Tonight, whichever way you want to look at it, we

didn't perform. That's my responsibility.

"No excuses. No excuses.

"Everything will be dissected now. I haven't got a problem with that. And I'll take responsibility."

Muscat's acceptance of responsibility is an oft-employed tactic by the long-term Victory man designed to deflect heat from players.

Just how many will be around to atone next season is anyone's guess.

Big-money marquee Keisuke Honda has given his intention to leave.

Top scorer Kosta Barbarouses and marquee James Troisi, injured and unavailable for Sunday's loss, are out of contract.

James Donachie and Raul Baena have reached the end of their loans, Georg Niedermeier is at the end of his deal, and offers should come for Lawrence Thomas after

a fine season.

Valeri, who was effectively retired by the result, was gobsmacked by the loss.

"It's hard to put your finger on it," he said.

"When you cop, six, almost seven, it could have been more ... there's lot of areas you can improve

"There's no nice way to put it and it kills me to say it.

"What I am going to do is take a lot of lessons and hopefully pass them on to future generations."

It was Victory's record loss and the second biggest defeat in A-League finals history, behind only Victory's 6-0 win over Adelaide United in the 2007 grand final.

Muscat said he would rebuild.

"We didn't perform anywhere near our capabilities," he said.

"We're proud football club. We will pick ourselves up and explore areas because we need to get better."

