



By George Stavroulakis

## → PERTH GLORY AIM TO BECOME KINGS OF ASIA

**Perth Glory** owner Tony Sage has shed some tears following his team's grand final loss but he is proud of what the club achieved this season. **They missed** out on being crowned A-League champions but Perth Glory have set their sights on an even bigger goal - to be the kings of Asia. **Perth's long** history of grand final heartbreak continued on Sunday when they lost the title decider to Sydney on penalties. **Glory players,** coaches and staff were gutted after the match, with owner Tony Sage saying he and his family even shed some tears. **Still, he** remains proud of the team and rates the season a huge success. **Glory secured** the Premiers Plate with two games to spare and qualified for the Asian Champions League for the first time. **Sage has** dreamed about the ACL for years and he doesn't want his team to merely make up the numbers.

**Tony Popovic** led Western Sydney to ACL glory in 2014 and Sage is hopeful the master coach can do the same for Perth.

"**We really** want to be the best club in Asia," said Sage, who has pumped almost \$30 million of his own money into Glory over the past 12 years.

"**We're the** premiers. That's fantastic for us.

"**My whole** dream of getting into Asia - once we get over this disappointment, the realisation that next year we'll be hosting those bigger clubs out of Japan and China and Korea - that's going to sink in."

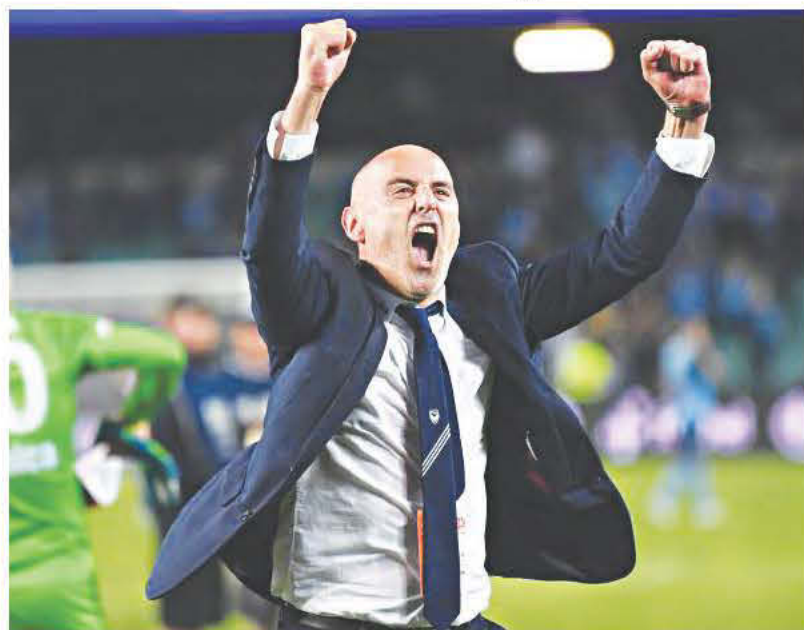
**Glory will** be boosted by the arrival of star striker Bruno Fornaroli next season.

**He will** join Andy Keogh, Chris Ikonomidis and Diego Castro in a formidable attack.

**A record grand** final crowd of 56,371 turned out for Sunday's match and Sage hopes to convert some of them into Glory members.



## Kevin Muscat departure from Melbourne Victory



**Kevin Muscat** shed tears today as he ended his longstanding tenure as Melbourne Victory coach.

**Victory have** never known life without Kevin Muscat but soon will, after the four-time A-League champion agreed an exit from the club.

**Muscat, the** club's foundation captain and longest-serving coach, has decided the time is right to leave the A-League giants and will depart after Wednesday's Asian Champions League (ACL) match with Sanfrecce Hiroshima.

**That dead** rubber is now transformed into an era-ending occasion, with Muscat, captain Carl Valeri and marquee Keisuke Honda to sign off. Other players will also leave this off-season, but none with Muscat's gravitas.

**Arriving at** the club in 2005, the on-field bruiser set the tone for Victory's participation - uncompromising, brutal, passionate and above all, successful. No club has won more titles than

Victory; though arch foes Sydney FC matched their haul of four championships on Sunday night when they defeated Perth Glory on penalties in the grand final.

**Muscat led** Victory on the field to the 2007 and 2009 titles as a player, and masterminded the 2015 and 2018 triumphs as coach.

"**I've just** got a feeling after 14 years that the time is right for a number of reasons," a clearly emotional Muscat told a packed media conference on Monday.

"**It's great** that I can sit here and then we (Muscat and Victory representatives) walk out of the room having a celebration. We walk out amicably rather than you guys just receiving a (media) release because we can't sit in the same room together.

"**And what** next? I don't really know at the moment. "**I'll take** the time to go on holiday and that will give me an opportunity to start to focus on what is next."

## COULD HARRY KEWELL BE THE NEXT VICTORY MANAGER?

Harry Kewell could be set for a surprise return Down Under after Kevin Muscat formally announced his departure from Melbourne Victory. Victory chairman Anthony Di Pietro said the search for Muscat's successor had already begun "but it's got to be the best possible person". Muscat is the sixth A-League coach to have left his club this season. His exit leaves two-season Newcastle Jets coach Ernie Merrick as the league's longest-serving boss.



## Ufuk Talay.. Six players had been dropped

New Wellington Phoenix coach Ufuk Talay has options to play with in recruitment after the club confirmed six players had been dropped for next season.

Nathan Burns, Antony Golec, Justin Gulley, Michal Kopczyński, Ryan Lowry, and Cillian Sheridan will leave at the end of their current contracts, which expire at the end of this week.

Burns, 31, joined at the beginning of the Hyundai A-League 2014/15 season and eventually won the

Johnny Warren Medal for his efforts in helping the side to an Elimination Final. The striker returned to the club from the J1 League in the 2017/18 season but due to re-occurring injuries, was unable to regain the form that had led to the 13 goals that won him the award four seasons ago.

Golec, 28, signed from Central Coast Mariners in January and provided vital cover for the backline alongside Andrew Durante and Steven Taylor. One of the centre-back's highlights

was the assist for Roy Krishna against his former club in March. Gulley, 26, returned to the club for his second stint at Wellington Phoenix back in January, providing back up to Louis Fenton and Liberato Cacace in the full-back positions. His professional manner and hard-working character have endeared him to fans since his debut with the club in 2015.

Kopczyński, 26, who played a major part in this year's finals appearing side will head back to Legia Warsaw

after completing his loan spell at Wellington Phoenix.

Lowry, 25, has been a loyal servant to the club since joining in 2016, making 19 appearances in that time. The defender has been a solid option when called upon and has been a great personality, on and off the field.

Sheridan, 30, made an instant impact in the Hyundai A-League when he was signed from the top league in Poland. The Irish International went on to make 17 appearances, scoring

once against Brisbane Roar. He was a fan favourite in his short time at Wellington and will be remembered fondly.

Football Operations Manager, Shaun Gill thanked the six departing players for their hard work and contributions to the club.

"We want to thank all these players for their time here in Wellington," Gill said.

"It's been a special season with these players involved and we wish them all the best in their future endeavours."