



By George Stavroulakis

## Round 12 Preview - NPL 3 NSW Men's

The scene is set for a glorious weekend with the temperature forecast to reach the mid 20's as we approach another action-packed weekend of the National Premier Leagues 3 NSW Men's competition. A mid-afternoon fixture at Hensley Athletic Field kicks off round 12 with another five ties scheduled throughout the rest of the day before Gladesville Ryde Magic wrap up proceedings with their match on Sunday afternoon.

**Stanmore Hawks return to Arlington Oval on Saturday night as they prepare to do battle with Sydney University SFC at 7pm.**

**For the** first time this season the Hawks will arrive into the weekend's fixture on the back of a defeat. Their nearest rivals will keep a keen eye on them to see how they react; will they crumble yet again? Or will Uni be dealt the brunt of last week's frustrations? This could prove a tricky tie to prepare for the 'students', they will need to assume that Stanmore are out for blood otherwise it could turn nasty for the visitors who have already suffered two demoralizing defeats over the last two weeks.

**Gladesville Ryde Magic and Dulwich Hill FC will round off this weekend's set of fixtures when they face off at Christie Park at 4pm on Sunday afternoon.**

**Magic have** found it difficult to sustain a positive run of results lately. They were fortunate to escape with a draw against Dunbar last weekend and apart from their 4-0 drubbing of Hawkesbury their league form has been quite up and down. Dully have also found themselves in a similar position, they have tasted just the one victory in their last five encounters. These inconsistent performances have seen them drop to 8th position on the ladder and another defeat this weekend will see place them further out of touch with the chasing pack who are all after that elusive fifth spot.

## FFA Cup, sixth round

Nepean FC - Sydney Olympic 1-2 AET  
St George Saints - APIA Tigers 1-0  
Hakoah Sydney - Marconi Stallions 0-3  
Rockdale City Suns - Sydney University 6-1  
Northern Tigers - Bonnyrigg WE 4-3

Hazelbrook FC - Mt Druitt Rangers 1-3 (0-3)  
Sutherland Sharks - Manly United\* 0-1 (0-1)  
Pittwater RSL - Wollongong Wolves\* 1-2 (1-0)  
\*Sydney United - Blacktown City 2-1 (0-0)

# HIBS BOSS LIFTS LIDS ON MILLIGAN EXIT

Hibernian manager Paul Heckingbottom has opened up about the surprise decision to release Socceroo midfielder Mark Milligan.

**Milligan had** impressed in his first season in Scotland, managing 31 appearances for Hibs.

**Heckingbottom, who** was appointed as Neil Lennon's replacement in February, admitted it was difficult to let the midfielder go.

**"It was** a killer for me," he told The Edinburgh News. "That's one of the two things I've done when I've been managing that hurt. It's tough sometimes.

**You make** decisions and people say it's part of the game and it is, but he's a real good bloke and he's done great for me.

**"Sometimes it's** easy if you sit someone down and tell them why they can't be in your team as a footballer or as a person. He's done great but you have to trust your gut and that's what I've done with.

**"But it** was tough that one. It was tricky."

**Milligan had** a year left to run on his deal after joining the Scottish side from Melbourne Victory in 2018.

**Heckingbottom explained** that he decided to get rid of the 33-year to "change everything about" and used a loophole in his contract to do it.

**"It's just** to change everything about," he said. "We've got that opportunity. There's a break in Mark's contract and we just took advantage of that really.

**"It's harsh** on him but in all honest if I want to recruit something different to play in that position, then that'd be harsh too - keeping him in the building and not playing him."



## Gallop backs A-League finals format

FFA boss David Gallop has pointed to record-breaking numbers to back the existing finals format of the A-League as opposed to a first past the post system.

**Alex Brosque's** call to scrap the A-League finals system isn't likely to get much traction after a record-breaking end to the 2018/19 campaign

**Retiring Sydney** FC captain Brosque volunteered his opinion after his team's Grand Final penalty shootout win over Premiers Plate winners Perth Glory on Sunday night.

**Brosque preferred** the first-past-the-post system, used in most of the rest of the football world, pointing out Sydney FC and Glory had won the Plate by large margins the last two seasons, but hadn't been recognised as champions. FFA boss David Gallop has pointed to strong attendances and ratings through the finals series - with Sunday's game in Perth attracting a record grand final crowd - as evidence of popular support for the existing format.

**"I think** football and Australian sport gets behind a finals series and we saw that with the numbers that were produced, crowds and ratings through this finals series," Gallop said on Tuesday.

**"People turned** out in record numbers and I think that underlines they are part of football and they are a part of Australian sport."

**Gallop admitted** there had been an officiating error which denied Sydney's Adam Le Fondre a normal-time goal in the Grand Final.

**"It looks** like in hindsight that was a marginally incorrect call, but it was a very very close one and video is never going to be flawless," Gallop said.

**"Though we** have to be reminded that it is there for

obvious error and that's where we've used it with good affect this season."

**When it** was suggested the offside call was an obvious error, Gallop said "Obviously those who had their eyes on it didn't see it that way, and didn't move to overturn the assistant ref's flag"

**While the** A-League continued to battle for ratings, attendances and media during the regular season Gallop was optimistic about its future.

**He looked** forward to the introduction of new club Western United next season, Macarthur FC the following year and also Western Sydney's imminent return to their rebuilt home venue.

**News Corp,** the major shareholder in Foxtel which is locked into a football

rights deal with the FFA until 2023, have signalled their intention to reduce investment in "non-marquee sporting content" which some have interpreted as a possible future concern for the A-League.

**"For the** time being we've got a safe contract and we're about building value around that to make sure that the next time we are in the market, whether it's with Foxtel or others, that we put forward a compelling proposition," Gallop said.

**"I think** streaming is a way that people are consuming the game more and more and we've got to keep our eye on that as well."

**Gallop said** discussions were continuing with the other parties who want to take over the running of the A-League. **He added:** "It's important that goes into the next phase with the foot on the pedal."

