



FRANCO PARISI

The 36-year-old made headlines at the weekend as he recorded a stunning brace at Illinden Sports Centre to inspire APIA towards a statement 5-1 victory over Rockdale City Suns.

Despite his age and the ever-increasing pace of the game, Parisi is enjoying his football more than ever.

“The goals are a reward but for me, I’m having so much fun playing with the group of guys that we have,” he said.

“I’m just loving being out there, the goals are a bonus, but really just playing with my mates who are great footballers is all part of it.”

“It’s been a few years with one or two changes each year but we’ve held the same nucleus of players.

“They’re all such good footballers but they’re really my friends too.

“I’m just loving being out there, the goals are a bonus, but really just playing with my mates who are great at football is all part of it.”

Parisi, a traditional ‘number ten’ in most senses, continues to contribute at the highest level both on and off the field.

His immense work-rate tracking back has not gone unnoticed by coach John Calleja and the APIA faithful.

“It’s part of the team now in football, certainly since I’ve started playing it’s changed,” Parisi revealed.

“Everyone’s got to be athletic now or there’s no room for you, so I have to do my defensive duties.

“Probably as I was coming through a ‘ten’ could do what he wanted, make things happen and that’s it.

“But there’s no luxury players out there anymore, everyone has to be working hard.”

Parisi is evidently a central figure in the APIA dressing room.

“We have a senior leadership group and it’s a pleasure to be part of that and to shape the way we come together as a team,” he revealed.

“That starts way back in preseason, well before we’ve kicked a ball or played a game.

“We already start bonding off the field, and I’m a big fan of driving that.

“I guess it’s my responsibility to drive that from way earlier than some of the others may be comfortable.

“I guess I’m proud to be able to do that, so by the first game of the season we’re already a united group.”

Parisi’s allegiance to the club spans over two decades; he joined APIA as a junior in 1994 and has represented the first team since 2005.

In that time, he has experienced all the highs and lows that football has to offer, with a plethora of moments standing out.

“For me, each season has had something iconic,” Parisi reflected.

“All of my teammates will probably stick with

me the most because long after I stop playing, I’ll remember the boys I played with and the way the club came together.

“The FFA Cup win against Melbourne Victory last year and minor Premiership the year before stand out, but obviously right now recency makes these easy ones to relate to.

“A few of the less successful seasons are still memorable; eight or nine years ago we ended up well clear after fighting to avoid relegation on a dirt field at Lambert Park.

“Outside of those it is tricky to pick exact moments as there are just so many!”

APIA Leichhardt Tigers head coach John Calleja offered a glowing appraisal of Parisi.

“Franco is a quality player, quality person and all-around good guy,” he said.

“He’s respected by everyone at the club: the players, staff and management.

“Vision and creativity are his major assets; he can pick a pass before other people see it.

“He can read a game very well and is a couple of steps ahead of everyone else most of the time.

“His passing range, first touch and control are all top class.

“As the number 10, he plays a major role in playing that final pass.

“This year he has also been doing a lot of defensive work, and he doesn’t shrink from that role ever.

“At training he is excellent, putting in all his effort, all the time.

“Franco is a very good person and a good leader on and off the pitch with his teammates: a true professional.”

Calleja’s outfit have at many points slipped under the radar this season, but sit comfortably in second place, just five points off the summit.

Both Calleja and Parisi revealed APIA’s fierce intentions to push current ladder leaders Wollongong Wolves all the way in a Premiership race that could well go down to the wire.

“My aim is to be a big part of pushing the club all the way to the Premiership and the Grand Final,” Parisi enforced.

“A couple of good goals on the weekend and a good win for us has helped us continue to build momentum and really challenge the Wolves.

“The total focus now is chasing down the Wolves for the Premiership.

“Then once we’re in the semis our focus will be winning the Grand Final.

“Those are two clear goals and my role is to drive the team not just as a player, but in my leadership capacity.”

When faced with the inevitable question surrounding a potential retirement, Parisi admitted it is a prospect he has barely considered.

“I haven’t thought about it, but I have said the same thing for about 7 years now,” he revealed.

“I will go to preseason, and I’ll know if I want to be there.

“If I’m not going to totally commit then I won’t do it. “I believe it will happen by itself, when either I’m no longer good enough, or no longer feel the commitment.

“That would be the time to walk away.

“For now, I’ve got six games to really focus on.

“Come the off-season I’ll enjoy that more than anyone and come preseason I’ll be back there to think about it.”

Parisi and APIA will be looking to continue their current surge of momentum into the business end of the season when they host Hakoah Sydney City East at Lambert Park on Sunday.

APIA Leichhardt Tigers legend Franco Parisi hopes to continue playing a significant role in the club’s pursuit of silverware this season.

