



By George Stavroulakis

ROUND 18 PREVIEW — NPL NSW

It's round 18 of the National Premier Leagues NSW Men's competition and the pressure couldn't be higher the regular season enters the final straight especially after Football NSW announced that it will be hosting the 2019 Grand Final at the wonderful Bankwest Stadium on Saturday August 31st.

There is only five games left meaning every match counts. Wollongong Wolves remain in pole position and could wrap up the premiership title by round 20 if results go their way.

However, APIA Leichhardt will be out to stop them starting with their match against third placed Blacktown City on Sunday.

It is an even split of matches across Saturday and Sunday this week with three games on each day starting with Sutherland Sharks clash with Marconi Stallions at 6.30pm on Saturday.

Sutherland Sharks v Marconi Stallions, 6.30pm Saturday at Seymour Shaw Park

The incredible late season run of Sutherland Sharks will be tested on Saturday as they take on Marconi Stallions at Seymour Shaw Park.

The Sharks are only one point outside the top five and a possible playoff spot and have gone their past nine game undefeated including three wins from their past five.

It is a spectacular turnaround from the Sutherland Shire based team who incredibly went ten games without a win to start the season.

Coach Terry Palapanis has the team firing on all cylinders and that was none more obvious than last week's 5-0

away win against Manly United.

What would've been most satisfying for Palapanis from the result is the performance of the club's veterans with Raul Romero and Mateo Poljak both contributing goals. They will be needed to put in other big showing this week to get past a driven Marconi outfit.

Another player that stood out was former Sky Blues midfielder Jerry Skotadis. He was everywhere against Manly United, and come Saturday, will be a marked man.

The Stallions have had a disappointing season but still hold their finals hopes in their hands.

A hard fought scoreless draw after being reduced to ten-men demonstrated a resolve many would've felt didn't exist in Marconi's star studded outfit.

As a result of the red card last week, Marconi will be without influential attacker Mitchell Mallia this week which will force a reshuffle in attack. The result of this match could play a huge part in deciding the finals fate of either team with only five games left in the regular season.

Expect a game where everything is put on the line in chase of victory.



Sydney FC v Rockdale City Suns, 7pm Saturday at Lambert Park

Sydney FC will be determined to end their five game losing streak when they take on Rockdale City Suns at Lambert Park on Saturday.

It's been a horror second half of the season for Sydney FC but at home against a Rockdale City Suns team going through a slump of their own they will be hopeful of collecting all three points.

A plucky performance against Blacktown City in a 3-1 defeat showed their signs of life for the Jimmy van Weeren coached team.

Young midfielder Ryan Teague has been tipped for a promising professional career and he has been in good form in a losing side. Teague, alongside Luke Ivanovic and Joel King offer Sydney FC plenty of quality and they will need to get the most out of the trio if they are to win.

Rockdale have slumped to one of the lowest points of their campaign losing five of their past six games.

In that time their defence has once again come under the spotlight after conceding 16 goals.

Interim coach Nick Porecca is scrambling for answers and he will need to find them

quick if they are somehow to sneak into the finals.

It's a big game for Rockdale but Sydney FC won't be easy beats. It's a match which could go either way.

Mt Druitt Town Rangers v Sydney United 58, 7pm Saturday at Popondetta Park

A four game winning streak may have come to an end but Mt Druitt Town Rangers shouldn't be written off when they host Sydney United 58 on Saturday.

The Rangers were on the wrong side of a Wollongong Wolves onslaught in round 17 4-1 defeat.

This week will be about a bounce back showing and they will look to veterans Mirjan Pavlovic and Fabricio Fernandez to deliver the X-factor required.

Coach Aidan Desmond will need to make a few changes after the send-off of Blake Thompson last week meaning he will be unavailable for this clash.

United 58 come into the game after a frustrating 0-0 draw with rivals Marconi last round.

Despite the Stallions playing most of the match with only ten-men, United couldn't