

# nsw



By George Stavroulakis

## Jonathan Aspro for Melbourne adventure

**The last 12 months have served as a crucial learning period for Western United recruit Jonathan Aspro.**

**Last year**, nursing an ACL injury and without a clear time frame of a return to football, Aspro left the comfort of his Sydney life for a new adventure, re-locating to Terrigal to play on the Central Coast of New South Wales.

**A family man** through and through, the 23-year-old had never lived out of home up until this point, and was forced to adapt to life on his own.

**Now settled** in Port Melbourne, a wiser, manlier appearing Jonathan Aspro – scarcely resembling the skinny teenager who first laced up his boots professionally for Western Sydney Wanderers, is ready for the challenge of a new club and city.

**"I learnt** a lot from living away from home, and in a good way living in Terrigal last season has sort of set me up for living in Melbourne, because now I know what it's like to live alone," Aspro told FTBL.

**"It forces** you to do a lot of things independently – your cooking, your cleaning, your washing - these are things you can take for granted because when you live at home everything's handed to you."

**"I've settled** into Melbourne quickly. I'm a family man and I love being around my family, but moving away from home for the first time and the independence that came with that – it's probably the best thing that's happened to me as a person."

**Carrying a** ruptured anterior cruciate ligament, Aspro's move away from home was further complicated by the uncertainty of when he would return to full fitness.

**Though his** time at Central Coast Mariners began on the sidelines, he eventually recovered from the ACL tear and cemented a spot in the first team.

**"For me** personally, last year was a good year," he said. "To come back and play a lot of games after being out for nine months was a really important step for me after being sidelined for so long.

**"The Mariners** gave me an opportunity to come to the club with a pre-existing long term injury – it wasn't



something I was going to get over in a matter of weeks - it kept me out for months.

**"It's not** every club that will sign you knowing you won't be able to play for six months, so I'm really grateful to everyone at the Mariners for the faith they showed in me."

**The latest** club to show faith in Aspro's ability is new A-League franchise Western United.

**The ambitious** A-League newcomers have already snared former Greece captain Panagiotis Kone and recently sealed the services of former Italy international Alessandro Diamanti.

**However, according** to Aspro, it is the prospect of working under Mark Rudan that excites him most about the latest chapter in his career.

**"I grew** up watching the A-League so I caught a couple of years of Mark's career when he played for Sydney FC,"

he said.

**"I've already** been lucky enough to be coached by a great centre-back in Popa and now I have a chance to gain even more knowledge and experience from Mark.

**"Working under** a manager whose played as a centre-back at a high level - you get those little tips that maybe a striker won't get from a centre-back, like body shape and footwork.

**"He likes** to play a very attacking style and wants to be on the front foot. I suppose the beauty of having a long pre-season is that we have plenty of time to adapt to his system.

**"He did** great things at Wellington Phoenix last year so hopefully his time at Western United will bear those same fruits."

**The official** A-League fixtures have yet to be released but Aspro's Western United are tipped to play their first

## Robbie Kruse.. "Once my agent spoke to me about Melbourne, my head immediately turned"

**A decade after Melbourne Victory showed Robbie Kruse what it takes to be a professional footballer, the Socceroos attacker is back to repay the favour.**

**Kruse, now** 30, feels a massive debt to Victory and is excited to be new manager Marco Kurz's first signing.

**While the** A-League powerhouse are playing catch-up with recruiting, there was more good news on Thursday when Victory announced fellow Socceroo Andrew Nabbout is also returning to the club.

**Nabbout, who** last played for the Victory in 2015, is back after a 16-month stint in Japan.

**Kruse said** as soon as he heard Victory were interested in him, the feeling was mutual.

**"Once my** agent spoke to me about Melbourne, my head immediately turned," he said.

**Kruse was** struggling with off-field problems when he left Brisbane to join Victory in 2009.

**Two years** later, he was playing in Germany and had started his 75-game career with the Socceroos.

**"I probably** wouldn't have the career I have today," he said when reflecting on his original stint at the Victory.

**"I'm not** too sure I would even be playing football. I got away from my comfort zone and moved down here.

**"It gave** me that platform to realise my potential and I will be forever grateful for that."

**Kruse said** family he and his wife have a young son was another major factor in returning to Melbourne.

**On the** field, his goals are straightforward.

**"I really** want to give back and lead by example," he said.

**"Obviously we're** here to win titles, because that's what Melbourne Victory does they're not a team that rebuilds, they're a team that is always up there. The fans expect that."

**Kruse is** in regular touch with Socceroos manager Graham Arnold and wants to add to his tally of international caps.

**"I've said** I will always put my hand up to play for the national team," Kruse said.

**"I have** the utmost respect for Graham as well and we were open about it.

**"I said** to him, I'm always here, if I'm performing well enough and up to the levels required." Kurz said signing Kruse sent a "clear message" to everyone at Victory.

**"It's really** important to have this kind of player, with this experience, but also hungry for the next step," he said.

**Victory still** have several vacant spots to fill, but Kurz added they are being selective in their recruiting.

**"We are** not the early bird at the moment in the league, but we feel comfortable we will find the right players," he said.

**The new** manager also said he did not try to retain Terry Antonis, who told him in their first conversation that he wanted to play in South Korea.

**"We lost** a high quality player, but in the end it was a decision for Terry," Kurz said.

**Nabbout will** return to Melbourne this weekend and his signing will be subject to a medical on Monday.

