



By George Stavroulakis

FTBL believes in the quality of Australia's coaches. But with such a small number of A-League clubs opportunity has been frustratingly limited: Enter the second division.

While the "Championship" remains in the planning stage with a start date of around 2021 or 2022, we believe it will prove the ideal platform for our emerging talent to kick off their head coach careers in the professional national league ranks.

We also feel the league should bring in a second division coach mentor, assigned to work with all coaches given many we believe will be in their 30s when the league finally kicks off.

Jets head coach Ernie Merrick would be the perfect candidate for emerging coaches mentor roles.

His experience and respect in the industry make him the perfect candidate to work with the younger would-be stars of the future.

MEET AUSTRALIA'S TOP 10 COACHES FOR THE SECOND DIVISION

1: BEN CAHN: CURRENTLY COACHING OLYMPIC FC IN BRISBANE

FTBL's story earlier this year on the English-born former Fulham junior was one of the most-read features we've run.

And this young coach (early 30s) is proving you can run a professional environment at the part-time level.

Last season, he turned the Brisbane club around in the QLD NPL.

Olympic finished second in the league and made the grand final. Not a bad first season.

Olympic FC is also looking a danger side from the NPL in the 2019 FFA Cup, further validation of Cahn's growing reputation following their Round of 32, 5-2 win over Bayswater earlier this month.

With a pro licence to be completed in Korea later this year, Cahn's career is shaping up with the certification and coaching experience coming together at the right time for a tilt with a professional outfit.

NPL, second division, A-League head coach and beyond?

This is a head coach going places.

2: RUBEN ZADKOVICH: CURRENTLY COACHING BROADMEADOW MAGIC IN NEWCASTLE

Like Cahn, Zadkovich takes a holistic, enlightened and thorough approach to the role of coach at NPL level, where he brings a professional environment to a part-time structure.

This isn't an old-fashioned, bark-orders boss.

He's one of the new breed who understand players in the modern era. After all, he could still be playing had it not been for terrible injuries.

"Zadko" has fine-tuned his methods and has found extraordinary success in a short time with the club after injury scuppered his playing career here and abroad (he also played for Derby County).

Magic won the Grand Final in 2018, and a Macedonian Cup.

Zadkovich's men also scored the most goals, had

the highest number of clean sheets and made the last 16 of the FFA Cup.

He's been mentored by Kenny Lowe and has the experience of being coached by Graham Arnold as a player.

The former Socceroo, now 33 has taken to coaching very quickly and has to be given a chance.

The second division will be Zadkovich's professional platform for a great future here and abroad.

3: SHAUN ONTONG CURRENTLY AN ASSISTANT COACH AT KERALA BLASTERS IN INDIA

A prodigy of respected young coach Arthur Papas (currently coaching under Ange Postecoglou at J-League title challengers Yokohama Marinos), Ontong has coached with Papas in the NPL and in India.

For one so young, 31, he's racked up over six years of coaching experience as an assistant, working from the ground up on his craft.

And he's from a real football background, being the son of former player Paul Ontong.

The ex-Young Socceroo captain and A-League player - whose career was cut short due to injury after stints with the Jets and the Reds - has taken to coaching very well and is racking up great experience working in an emerging Asian league under experienced foreign coaches.

His time in India has included North East United and now he's with Kerala Blasters.

By the time the second division kicks off, Ontong will have done a very well-rounded apprenticeship.

And will be ready for a stint as a head coach in the second division.

4: PETER CKLAMOVSKI: CURRENTLY AN ASSISTANT COACH AT YOKOHAMA MARINOS IN JAPAN

Absolutely a talent worth watching and admiring,



he's been guided by and has worked with Postecoglou for much of the past 11 or so years.

First at Panaxaiki in Greece, then Melbourne Victory and with the Socceros, he's clearly rated and trusted by the former Socceros boss.

The 30-something Cklamovski was also fitness coach at Glory, Adelaide and with FFA. Cklamovski was briefly the Joeys coach in 2017, before taking on the role in Japan to work with Postecoglou, his mentor, 19 months ago.

Watching sessions with the Socceros, FTBL has always been impressed by this fitness specialist who has a broad range of knowledge, a knowledge that has been fine-tuned in the region's best league, the J-League, with Postecoglou at Yokohama Marinos.

His mantra? Belief. Process. Performance. Results. Would he want to leave his assistant coach position? Who knows, but if he wanted a head coach role in Australia, the second division would be an ideal start for the Sydneysider who began his career as Head of Performance at Westfield Sports High.

5: HUSS SKENDEROVIC: LAST JOB WITH DANDENONG THUNDER IN NPL VIC

Another young Aussie coach who's expanded his horizons and coached overseas.

In his case, in the UAE where he enjoyed a three-year stint with Ajman.

He also worked with UAE national U-17 level coaches and as a result, gained valuable insights into another coaching mentality in the region.

Added to this is his experience locally as a head coach in the W-League with Adelaide United and in the Victorian NPL.

Currently studying his AFC/FFA Pro Diploma in this country where he's updating his knowledge and evolving his coaching philosophy, Skenderovic is another coach to watch and a smart option for second division clubs.

PART I