

# REVIEW – NPL NSW MEN'S



## APIA Leichhardt Tigers v Blacktown City, Saturday 7pm at Lambert Park

Two of the league's heavy hitters will go toe to toe on Saturday night as APIA Leichhardt Tigers take on Blacktown city in the preliminary semi-final at Lambert Park.

Both APIA and Blacktown have featured regularly during the finals stage of the competition over the past five years and will be once aiming for nothing short of Championship success.

**Saturday's match** will be the second time they have faced off this season with both matches being tightly contested 1-1 draws.

**A much** changed APIA team suffered a shock loss to Mt Druitt Town Rangers in the final round which is sure to give coach John Calleja a few extra things to ponder coming into the finals.

**One major** concern for Calleja is key defender Josh Symons who suffered a hamstring injury in their 2-2 draw with Sydney FC.

**He is** unlikely to feature much during the finals if early reports prove accurate meaning Themba Muata-Marlow will return to marshal the centre of defence alongside Paul Galimi while Tynan Diaz will most likely fill the gap at right back.

**Adrian Uchino** will also return to the starting line-up after playing off the bench against Mt Druitt.



**One player** that will want to make statement in this match will be the Tigers sharpshooter Chris Payne.

**Payne missed** out by a solitary goal for the Golden Boot award to Thomas James and he will no doubt have that fire in his belly to give it his all in earning his club a spot against the Wolves.

**Blacktown also** dropped points in the final match of the regular season as they were held to a 1-1 draw against Hakoah Sydney City East.

**City boss** Mark Crittenden most likely won't take too much away from that result with a number of his regulars either rested or given less minutes.

**A full** strength team is expected to take the field on Saturday with veteran striker Joey Gibbs key to their success.

**After a** slow start to the season, veteran striker Joey Gibbs

has hit top form over the second half of the campaign and has played a massive role in Blacktown's climb to third.

**Look to** Pacy wingers such as Leroy Jennings to make the most of Gibbs hold up play while the number 9 will also be hoping to get on the end of a few crosses.

**These two** teams have been the gold standard in the NPL NSW Men's competition for the last few seasons and that has not ceased to be the case in 2019.

**Expect a** tense arm-wrestle with neither side giving much away.

**Chances will** be at an absolute premium and wasted opportunities could prove costly.

**While defeat** won't mean elimination, the pressure is still on and neither APIA or Blacktown will want to start their finals game with a loss.