



By George Stavroulakis



SYDNEY UNITED 58 - MARCONI STALLIONS

A dramatic extra-time brace from substitute Patrick Antelmi has helped Sydney United 58 eliminate Marconi Stallions with a 2-0 win in the elimination semi-final at Sydney United Sports Centre

It was a brilliant performance from Antelmi who added to his brilliant finals scoring record to lift United 58 at home after the match was deadlocked. The Substitute coolly finished after a Sim pass in the 92nd minute before wrapping up the win with a penalty in the 112th to end Marconi's finals campaign.

The win keeps United's finals hopes alive and sets up a semi-final clash against either Blacktown City on Wednesday night.

The home side started the better of the two sides with midfielder Tarik Maia firing straight at the keeping eight minutes in for the first chance of the match.

Marconi's reply was from a direct free-kick by Mitchell Mallia in the 16th minute which forced a big save from Thomas Manos.

Marconi pressed from the left channel midway through the first stanza of play with Marko Jestic who attempted to break the deadlock, but his shot missed the mark thanks to some skilful intervention from the Sydney United 58 defence.

Another free-kick from the Stallions drifted across the face of goal in the 32nd minute and reached Zachary Cairncross at the far post who headed the ball into the side netting, much to the relief of the home fans.

A couple of dangerous crosses in the space of a minute, late in the first half, caused some heartbeats to skip for Marconi but the home side certainly couldn't capitalise on the momentum and the first 45 minutes finished scoreless.

The first real chance of the second half fell to Sydney United 58 and it was a double barrel attempt when both Peter Simonoski and Liam Rose had their consecutive shots blocked by some desperate Marconi defence.

In the 63rd minute James Andrew cleverly found Brandon Vella in the box and his close range attempt was delightfully turned away for a corner by an alert Manos. It was a very good chance for the Stallions – their best in the second stanza of play – that probably should have been capitalised on.

In the 73rd minute a clinical shot from Simonoski was well blocked by Nathan Millgate showing all of his experience in defence.

The hosts were at it again shortly afterwards. A corner by Maia from the left was directly on target but was well punched away by Vekic as the home side pressed



forward.

Sydney United 58 came terribly close in the 88th minute when Patrick Antelmi let fly with a thunderbolt that flashed past the post.

A minute later a perfect cross from the left found Matthew Sim in the box and he delightfully danced his way past two defenders, but his final shot was only centimetres wide of the intended target much to the despair of the home fans.

The game then finished 0-0 in regular time despite a very late claim for a penalty by Marconi that was waived away by referee Ben Abraham.

In the first period of supplementary time in the 92nd minute Sydney United 58 broke the deadlock. Sim with some very neat work near the by-line found Antelmi lurking with intent and he made no mistake to give the home side the advantage.

A few minutes later a long and dangerous cross from the left found Brandon Vella at the far post but his close range header was fumbled, but still cleared, by Manos with a desperate dive. It was a dangerous reply by Marconi who were determined to equalise.

Almost immediately afterwards Marconi rolled the dice again and came agonisingly close as Jestic hit the post with Manos well and truly beaten. That's how close the encounter truly was with only a coat of paint separating the sides – and in this case denying Jestic.

In the 112th minute Sydney United 58 were awarded a penalty when Christian Gonzalez went down in the box and referee Ben Abraham ran straight to the spot. Super-sub Antelmi from the spot made no mistake even though Vekic dived correctly. It was enough to end Marconi's gallant season as Sydney United live to fight another day.

After the game Sydney United 58's delighted coach Miro Vlastelica said.

"Definitely a good win but I think the game should have been finished in normal time because we had some good chances.



"We have been getting better in the last month and if this is the form we can take with us on Wednesday, we'll be okay.

"We need to get our recovery right and we'll go again. The opposition on Wednesday is in the same boat as us backing up and I am confident in my players that they can do the job.

"Tonight for us was a complete team performance; we dug deep and we never stopped. It was that winning mentality that got us across the line."

The Marconi Stallions dressing room was fairly sombre but coach Peter Tsekennis was still very proud of his team.

"I thought it was a fairly average game to be honest and we were fairly flat today," he said.

"Sydney United 58 probably wanted a little bit more but it was semi-final sort of football.