

# WOLLONGONG WOLVES - APIA LEICHHARDT TIGERS 0-1

## APIA LEICHHARDT TIGERS BOOK BANKWEST GRAND FINAL SPOT AS PREMIERS BOUNCED

**It was** one of the competition's most lethal marksmen in Chris Payne that proved to be the difference with the deadly marksman scoring in the 81st minute that sent the APIA troops into raptures.

**Payne has** been an absolute steal for the Tigers since moving to the club this year having come across from rivals Sydney United 58. The ace marksman has racked up a tally of 22 goals for the year and has firmly set his eyes on winning silverware.

**John Calleja** had a game plan to nullify the Premiers who were firm favourites from the get-go and it worked to a tee as the Wolves grew frustrated in not being able to play its normal game.

**Coming from** playing 120 minutes of football as well as penalties in their 5-3 win last Saturday against Blacktown City, it was always going to be a tall order for the visitors but determination and playing to a game plan worked wonders for the APIA side.

**The visitors** showed the initiative in the first exchanges of the match moving the ball quickly up the field.

**The early** pressure resulted in a chance for Payne in the second minute.

**The Tigers'** top-scorer took aim from just outside the box cutting inside onto his right foot, prompting an important save Justin Pasfield who got down well to his right-hand side putting the ball out for a corner.

**Wollongong created** their first real opening of the match with a quarter of an hour played.

**A long-pass** from Nick Littler found Thomas James in acres of space on the left-hand side.

**From there,** the Golden Boot winner shifted the ball inside onto his right foot and lashed a strike goalwards which was deflected into the path of Takeru Okada.

**His cross-cum-shot** nearly deceived APIA veteran custodian Ivan Necevski with the ball narrowly clearing the crossbar.

**The Wolves'** pressure continued four minutes later when James again found space – this time on the right-hand side.

**The Englishman's** first cross was easily cleared however it fell straight back to him.

**His second** delivery was far more successful with his driven attempt flashing across the face of goal narrowly avoiding a touch from Lachlan Scott.

**APIA then** had a couple of chances prior to

half-time with maestro Franco Parisi and Corey Biczo skying their efforts over the bar after some handy build-up play.

**Despite both** sides creating openings, the scores were level at the break setting up a decisive second period.

**From the** first kick of the second half, the Wolves were on the attack.

**A ball** lofted forward by Littler found Madden on the right-hand side who flicked the ball into the channel for James.

**Making a** shooting angle, he attempted to power a strike into the far corner but Necevski got down early to deny the Wollongong man.

**With three-quarters** of the game played, Wollongong created one of their best chances of the game.

**James received** the ball on the right-hand side and whipped in an inviting cross which found its way to the back post where Scott was waiting.

**The ball** bounced too high for the hosts meaning Scott was unable to make a meaningful contact with the ball allowing the Tigers to clear their lines.

**The hosts** would be left to rue missed chances as in the 81st minute, John Calleja's men found the only goal of the match.

**Sean Symons** made inroads down the left-hand side eventually making his way into the box.

**A neat** ball across the goal found an unmarked Payne who tapped in from close range which cued massive celebrations on the Tigers bench.

**This was** the first time the Tigers had found a way passed the Wolves in nearly 270 minutes this season.

**Payne had** evaded the Wolves defence and left Pasfield a stunned figure as he saw the ball hit the back of his net.

**Despite Wollongong** throwing numbers forward in the latter stages of the match, they were unable to find a way through meaning APIA booked their place in the grand final.

**Tigers' coach** John Calleja praised the way his side executed their game plan against the Wolves and was proud of how his 'underdogs' took it to the Premiers who qualified for their third successive NPL NSW Men's Grand Final.

**"They played** very well.

**"We knew** if we stayed with them then we would get opportunities.

**"It was** a good game plan and it worked.

**"The boys** will now recover and we will prepare for the big final next Saturday at Bankwest Stadium."

**Luke Wilkshire** was critical of the way his side approached the game in the first half but noted the improvement shown in the second period.

**"The first** half there wasn't enough intensity.

**"We gave** the ball away far too many times in bad areas.

**"I think** the second half was better but we lacked that cutting edge".

**The Wolves** will now need to regroup with a huge clash this Saturday in a winner takes all battle against a roaring Sydney United 58 outfit who ran out 7-3 winners against Blacktown City as they kept their finals hopes alive.

### Match Stats

**Wollongong Wolves** 0

**APIA Leichhardt Tigers** 1 (Payne 81')

**Wednesday 21st** August 2019

**WIN Stadium,** Wollongong

**Referee:** A. Arndt

**Assistant Referees:** M. McOrist and N. Wotton

**Fourth Official:** C. Fisher

**Wollongong Wolves:** 1. Justin Pasfield (GK), 2. Taylor McDonald, 3. Darcy Madden (20. Brandon Stojcevski 78'), 4. Nikola Djordjevic, 7. Christopher Price, 9. Thomas James, 11. Takeru Okada 15. Nick Littler, 16. Guy Knight, 17. James Stojcevski (10. Brendan Griffin 67'), 24. Lachlan Scott

**Substitutes Not Used:** 12. Luke Kairies, 8. Bul Juach, 6. Benjamin Tosi

**Yellow Cards:**

**Red Cards:**

**APIA Leichhardt Tigers:** 1. Ivan Necevski (GK), 3. Paul Galimi, 6. Christopher Payne (19. Dominion Nasrabadi 93'), 7. Tynan Diaz, 8. Corey Biczo, 10. Franco Parisi (5. Nicholas Stavroulakis 84'), 12. Sam McIllhatton, 15. Themba Muata-Marlow, 16. Sean Symons, 18. Adrian Uccchino, 21. Michael Kouta

**Substitutes Not Used:** 4. Nicholas Azzone, 22. Luke Turnbull, 14. Lachlan Hughes

**Yellow Cards:** Uccchino 55', Kouta 88'