



By George Stavroulakis

ROUND 26 PREVIEW – NPL 3 NSW MEN’S

The final round is finally upon us as we get to sit back and enjoy one last full set of fixtures in the 2019 National Premier Leagues 3 NSW competition.

In keeping with tradition, all this weekend’s matches will kick off simultaneously, with all the action set to get underway at 3pm on Sunday afternoon.

This weekend will provide us with the last piece of the puzzle as we find out who will be the final side to book their place in the highly anticipated finals.

Third plays fourth at Christie Park as SD Raiders FC make the trip to Marsfield to take on Gladesville Ryde Magic on Sunday afternoon.

Magic have not been able to string a consecutive run of positive results together for the last month and will be eager to get the three points

against Raiders ahead of the finals in a fortnight’s time.

The away side sit on 54 points, nine points above their hosts and on the same amount of points as 2nd placed Bankstown City. Goal differential is the only thing that separates the two sides, however a victory for Raiders coupled with a Bankstown loss against Dunbar will see Nick Carle’s men leapfrog their rivals.

The race for the golden boot will also run into the last weekend of the season proper as Raiders’ Anthony Proia contends with Lions’ Nikola Todoroski, the pair have 27 goals each while Stanmore’s Jovan Blagojevic is hot on

their heels with 26 goals to his name.

The corresponding fixture ended in a 1-1 stalemate with Proia getting on the score sheet in the first half before Gladesville’s Chris Triantis converted from the penalty spot midway through the second half.

Stanmore Hawks FC will grace the field for the first time since they were confirmed as this season’s Premiers when they face off against Bankstown United FC at Jensen Park.

Last round saw Bankstown secure their position in the top six after they drew 2-2 against Parramatta.

They currently sit in 5th place on 40 points,

three points ahead of nearest rivals Inter. However, a defeat against the Hawks along with a victory for Inter against the Mariners could see United drop to 6th due to their inferior goal difference.

Stanmore will need to refocus after last week’s celebrations as they prepare for their last match before the finals.

Blagojevic is still in with a shout for collecting the golden boot, so it is unlikely that they will take their foot off the gas come Sunday.

Both sides took a share of the points the last time they went head to head, with 1-1 the full time score back in June.

FAMILY FUELING PAYNE DESIRE TO LIFT TROPHY FOR APIA

A personal mission is set to be the driving force motivating APIA Leichhardt Tiger’s star striker Chris Payne to carry his side to grand final

The veteran front-man has been scoring goals for fun this campaign but revealed the struggle of his son Cayde, who suffers from Spina bifida, has been the inspiration behind his on field heroics.

The former North Queensland Fury and Newcastle Jets striker explained how his son loves to watch him play and enjoys nothing more than seeing his dad find the back of the net.

Ahead of the National Premier Leagues NSW grand final, Payne told Football NSW that he would love nothing more than seeing the joy on Cayde’s face when he lifts the championship trophy with a win on Saturday.

“We’ve been in and out of hospital with Cayde a number of times for surgery so it has been a tough time for the family,” Payne said.

“He comes to a lot of the games and is always

smiling which keeps me going as well.

“My family mean everything to me and I owe so much to my wife for everything she does. If it wasn’t for her I don’t think I would still be playing football.

“Obviously their motivation will again play a big part and I hope I can do them proud by helping APIA lift the championship.”

The front-man, who joined APIA at the start of the season after an acrimonious exit from Sydney United 58, said he has loved his time at Lambert park and is determined to help the club win the championship title which has eluded them.

He admitted the unfortunate nature of his United exit will be in the back of his mind when he faces off against his former side at Bankwest Stadium.

“I had a few successful years with Sydney United and really enjoyed my time at the club but they felt they didn’t need me any more after last season. The club didn’t even contact me to tell me I wasn’t going to be re-signed. One of my teammates had to break the news to me,” he said.

“That sort of thing really leaves a sour taste in your mouth but it did give me the chance to join APIA who have been an incredible club to be a part of.

“I have been fortunate to find a new home at APIA and helping this team win the title is my main priority. However, the fact that we need to beat Sydney United will make it a little bit sweeter for me if we are to win.”

Payne had one of his best performances of the season in APIA’s 3-1 win against Sydney

United in Round 4 when he scored a brilliant hat-trick in his first return to Edensor Park since joining APIA.

The 28-year-old is determined for a repeat of that performance at Bankwest stadium on Saturday.

“Playing in a grand final is always exciting and that is no different this time around,” Payne

“I’m feel really good heading into this match and can’t wait to walk out onto the pitch with my kids at the start of the game.

“I’ve scored some really important goals for the team this season and I’m confident I can continue to score big goals for the team.”

“It should be a great night for APIA and hopefully we can come home with the grand final victory this club has been waiting for.”

UNITED 58 LEGEND MARKOVIC WANTS TO END CAREER ON A HIGH

Sydney United 58 club legend Petar Markovic is on the verge of a dream Grand Final farewell at Bankwest Stadium on Saturday night.

The 36-year-old announced earlier in the season that 2019 would be his last, and enjoyed an emotional send-off aloft on his teammates’ shoulders at Sydney United Sports Centre following United 58’s Round 22 clash with Manly United.

However little did he know then, his season was far from over.

Fast forward a fortnight or so, Markovic finds himself faced with an incredible final week of his career that includes an FFA Cup Round of 16 meeting with the Western Sydney Wanderers, and one last NPL NSW Grand Final against the APIA Leichhardt Tigers.

Saturday night’s decider will be the last time the 36-year-old dons the club’s iconic red and white kit, one that he has enjoyed an emotional affinity with for over 22 years.

As the ever-reliable defender prepares to bid farewell to his playing days, he cannot help but appreciate the unbelievable scenario he and the club he loves have afforded themselves.

“It’s a fairy tale, scripted to a tee, I guess,” Markovic said.

“It will be a send-off to remember for the rest of my life, especially if we get the win.

“I’ve been getting a lot of messages of support this week; it’s been really nice and a bit overwhelming.”

Since debuting for Sydney United in the NSL at the age of 18, Markovic has won just about everything there is to win with the club.

However despite his glimmering record, he is more determined than ever to capture this weekend’s opportunity with both hands and lift one last title.

The defensive stalwart provided a snapshot of the inspirational message he will deliver to his teammates heading into the big dance.

“I’ve been a member of Grand Final winning teams before and being a senior player, I’ll do whatever it takes to get the boys ready,” Markovic revealed.

“I’m going to encourage them just to enjoy themselves, as you don’t get too many of these moments in football.

“If we stick to what we’ve been told and what we’ve been working on, I believe we will come out on top.”

Despite the emotional backdrop to Saturday’s contest, Markovic insists that once kick-off time arrives, it will be business as usual.

“We are just taking this game as any other game, where we worry about ourselves and not too much about the opponent.

“We will just stay disciplined, work with what we have, and there are no particular



opposition players that we have to concentrate on.

“We all know APIA’s capabilities and strengths as a team, and we will just enjoy it and do everything we can to get the win.”