



By George Stavroulakis

# FROM PLAYING TO COACHING, D'APUZZO READY FOR GRAND FINAL CHALLENGE

When the APIA Leichhardt Tigers take to the pitch in their third consecutive National Premier Leagues NSW Men's Grand Final this Saturday, David D'Apuzzo will unfortunately be resigned to the Bankwest Stadium technical area.



**The 30-year-old**, who has featured in the last two deciders, suffered a season-ending ACL injury during the Tigers' Round 5 clash with the Rockdale City Suns back in April.

**During his** extended lay-off, D'Apuzzo has maintained involvement in the squad by taking up the mantle as an assistant coach.

**And despite** experiencing a couple of heartbreaks in recent years, the former A-League defender is confident that a new-look APIA side under John Calleja can belatedly break their duck this weekend.

**"Sydney United** are a good side and every time we've played them this year it's been a tough game," D'Apuzzo reflected.

**"We've got** the better of them the last couple of times but it's never an easy match and I expect no different on the weekend.

**"I believe** if we play how I know we can play it will put us in good stead.

**"It was** good to have the weekend off to refocus and prepare ourselves for the match.

**"So far** everything is as we hoped, and we'll go into the game on Saturday with the right mentality to hopefully get the win."

**D'Apuzzo assured** that the club have learnt their lessons from previous years as they face the pressure cooker of a must-win occasion yet again.

**"Over the** last few years we've found that finals football is very different to regular season football," he revealed.

**"It's more** about making sure that you stay in the game, keeping nice and compact.

**"At the** end of the day it's about the result, rather than the performance.

**"I think** where in previous years where we've probably played better and haven't gotten the results, this time around we know to make sure we're solid, and then know we'll get our chances.

**"Hopefully someone** will take one and allow us to come away with the win."

**D'Apuzzo is** one of the longest serving members of APIA's current squad, having originally joined the club over a decade ago.

**While he** is progressing well on the road to recovery, the former Central Coast Mariner



will continue to deliberate his playing future over the off-season.

**Regardless of** his decision, D'Apuzzo is eager to maintain involvement within the club.

**"To be** honest I'm not sure if I will return (as a player)," he said.

**"While I'd** love to be back playing, I have two young kids now and it makes the commitment to training a little more difficult.

**"My rehab's** going well and from now until the start of next season there's a lot that can happen.

**"I hope** to be playing again, but if I'm not playing, I want to still be around the club in some respect."

