



FROM UNITED 58 TO APIA STAVROULAKIS LOOKING TO LIFT TROPHY WITH TIGERS

Nick Stavroulakis may be the only man who has represented both APIA Leichhardt and Sydney United 58 this season, but his allegiance will be firmly with the Tigers come Saturday night's Grand Final between the two clubs at Bankwest Stadium.



The 34-year-old is looking to contribute his hefty experience to maximise the club's chances of ensuring that third time is indeed a charm when it comes to Grand Final appearances.

After five seasons and over 100 appearances for United 58, where he was their Club Captain, the combative midfielder unexpectedly traded Edensor Park for Lambert Park back in May.

"It was something that I did not think was going to happen," Stavroulakis recalled.

"But as they say, when one door closes another one opens, and I'm blessed to be at another great club like APIA.

"Franco Parisi has been trying to get me over for a while now, and he was my 'agent' in making the move happen.

"After he called me, the decision was made straight away."

The 34-year-old has relished his fresh surroundings and recalled how he was immediately introduced to the special culture cultivated by the Tigers in recent years.

"I wanted to go somewhere I would be challenged again, and I always believed we would make the last day here at APIA," he reflected.

"They're a good bunch of very talented boys, and a squad who stick together so well.

"Everyone's close mates on and off the pitch and that allows the boys to play for each other and pull together in the circumstances where that is needed.

"Dave D'Apuzzo, John Calleja and the committee have been unbelievable in making it an easy transition for me."

As APIA approach their third consecutive Grand Final, Stavroulakis is looking forward to the fourth of his glimmering career.

He has lifted his fair share of silverware with the Sutherland Sharks and Sydney United 58, winning a total of nine trophies including the NPL NSW Men's Premiership, TAFE Waratah Cup, NPL Finals Series and a solitary Championship title as skipper of the Sharks back in 2009.

A decade on, Stavroulakis now strongly considers the significance of respecting the magnitude of the occasion come Grand Final day.

"Grand finals are a different occasion," he said.

"People say you can approach it as a normal game, but you can't – there's much more to it.

"You've only got one opportunity to raise that trophy, and you might not be the best team on the day, but with a bit of luck you can come up trumps and that's all that matters.

"Finals aren't there to be played, they're there to be won."

Building upon his on-field contributions, Stavroulakis has lent a helping hand to APIA's coaching staff off the pitch.

Having recently completed his FFA Coaching 'B' Licence, Stavroulakis has assisted coach John Calleja and assistant David D'Apuzzo in their pre-match analysis of opponents.

And as APIA prepare to face an extremely familiar foe this Saturday, his insights may well prove decisive.

However, Stavroulakis enforced that the majority of the focus must remain on APIA's preparation than that of the other outfit vying for the Championship.

"Post-football I am looking to take up a coaching role somewhere, and I have enjoyed assisting Johnny and Davey in analysing all of our opposition," he revealed.

"I've assisted in dissecting how we can nullify each oppositions' strengths, and how we can use our own strengths to exploit their weaknesses.

"It obviously helps this weekend that I was at United for a long time and know each player's traits very well!

"I have played a bit of a part in terms of our build-up to the game but at the same time we're looking at ourselves more than anyone else."

As for any lingering loyalties garnered towards his old club, Stavroulakis assured that these will all be out of the equation come Saturday.

"The day I left the doors at United was the day that era finished for me," he revealed.

"I know that I will always have great memories with the club and will always have a special place for the fans at SUS.

"You can't dwell on the past though, as unfortunately football is a business now.

"I've already played against them (United 58) in my second game for APIA which was really emotional, but now I have to focus on my team and my teammates.

"APIA have welcomed me with open arms from day one and I can't thank this group enough.

"We're now looking to get the job done, and hopefully come Saturday night we're celebrating lifting the trophy.

"My game plan has always been that I always play for the name on the jersey and come Grand Final day if I am needed, I will my all for the APIA badge.

"A lot of the boys and staff have had two bites of the cherry and not come up trumps yet, and I want nothing more than for them to experience that special feeling of winning it."