NSW

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FINALS SERIES ROUND 2 REVIEW

NPL 2 NSW MEN'S

It was a day where the amount of action on the field matched the amount of wind blowing through Sydney. Four teams have been whittled down to the final two – North Shore Mariners and Hills United will meet this coming Saturday to decide the destination of the 2019 National Premier Leagues 2 NSW Men's Championship.

Hills United v Bonnyrigg White Eagles 2-1(2-0) (Daniel Fogarty 11', Nathan Rayner 20') (Jack Armson 83')
At Lily Homes Stadium

Hills United continued their excellent record at Lily Homes Stadium, defeating Bonnyrigg White Eagles 2-1 to make it 13 games without defeat at the Seven Hills venue.

First half strikes from Daniel Fogarty and Nathan Rayner put the hosts in a commanding position. A late goal from Bonnyrigg midfielder Jack Armson would set up a grandstand finish, but Hills held on to secure their place in the Grand Final.

The first goal came on 11 minutes thanks to a familiar name. Hills captain Daine Merrin released Fogarty, who sprinted away from the defence and slotted a low shot past James Chronopoulos for his 20th goal of the campaign.

Bonnyrigg almost responded immediately when Aaron Peterson won possession and was through on goal, but Shaun Catlin rushed out quickly to block both Peterson's shot and Asmir Kadric's follow up effort.

Hills then doubled their lead with 20 minutes played. Merrin's ball over the top held up in the wind, allowing Fogarty to beat Chronopoulos to the ball. Although Fogarty's initial shot rebounded off the post, Rayner was in the right place to force the ball home.

Four minutes later, Sam Gallaway tried to use the wind to Bonnyrigg's advantage, however Catlin was alert and tipped his inswinging corner to safety.

Around the half hour mark, there were excellent covering tackles at both ends. Nikola Zonjic got his timing right after Fogarty ran into the area, and Eoin Montford made a crucial challenge when Peterson raced towards the Hills goal.

In the 37th minute, Hills nearly grabbed a third goal as Jarrod Dodds rose highest at a Wade Giovenali corner kick, but Chronopoulos did brilliantly to claw the ball away from the top corner. It was Bonnyrigg's turn to threaten on the stroke of halftime as Kadric intercepted a pass and found Peterson, who fired over the crossbar.

Hills went close from two set pieces early in the second half. On 53 minutes, Wade Giovenali's corner was headed on by Merrin, and Dodds wasn't too far away with an improvised flick. A few minutes later Kento Sakurai would be denied by a slight deflection, his 25 yard free kick flying wide of the target.

Momentum then swung Bonnyrigg's way. David Vrankovic set up substitute Richard Darko, with Catlin saving the shot at the second attempt. Kadric also looked lively, playing a couple of low crosses into the six yard box, however Peterson couldn't capitalise on either occasion.

Just over ten minutes remained when Rayner showed some great skill, dummying past one opponent and beating another, but Gallaway got in the way before the Hills forward could pull the trigger.

That tackle helped keep the White Eagles in the contest, and they pulled a goal back in the 83rd minute. Mark Rodic volleyed Gallaway's corner kick to Kadric, and although his strike was heading wide, Armson redirected the ball into the net.

Bonnyrigg would pile on the pressure in the closing stages. Kadric used his blazing speed on 89 minutes, beating a defender and cutting the ball back for Peterson, who prodded the ball inches wide of the post. Their last chance came in stoppage time as Darko beat Catlin to Bradie Smith's cross, heading just over the crossbar.

Hills United: 1. Shaun CATLIN, 3. Jarrod DODDS, 7. Wade GIOVENALI (6. Bradley ROBERTSON 77'), 8. Eoin MONTFORD, 10. Jordan PARFAIT (9. Alexander VLISMAS 74'), 11. Daine MERRIN (c), 16. Gregory GIOVENALI, 19. Glen KELSHAW, 22. Kento SAKURAI, 24. Nathan RAYNER (30. Adolph KOUDAKPO 83'), 44. Daniel FOGARTY

Bonnyrigg White Eagles: 1. James CHRONOPOULOS, 3. David VRANKOVIC (13. James McKENZIE 72'), 5. Goran SUBARA, 6. Nikola ZONJIC (9. Jack FULTON 67'), 11. Asmir KADRIC, 12. Jack ARMSON, 14. Bradie SMITH, 15. Ray MILLER (7. Richard DARKO 37'), 16. Sam GALLAWAY (c), 17. Mark RODIC, 19. Aaron PETERSON

North Shore Mariners v Mounties Wanderers 5-0 (Daniel Saric 22' 65', Mitchell Smith 28', Braden Cheng 66', Sean Eve 90')
At Valentine Sports Park No. 2

The Saturday evening game saw a commading performance from North Shore Mariners, scoring five goals without reply against Mounties Wanderers.

North Shore were in control after first half goals from Daniel Saric and Mitchell Smith. Saric and Braden Cheng found the net in the second half to put the game out of reach, and Sean Eve's spectacular 90th minute goal rounded off the scoring.

The Mariners attacked from the opening whistle, and in the fourth minute Mitchell Smith got on the end of a Saric right wing cross and sidefooted the ball inches wide, fooling some of the crowd into thinking the ball had gone in.

Just before the quarter hour, Mitchell Smith had another chance when Chris Lindsay picked him out, but Jacob Poscoliero was able to make the block. Cheng then had a big opportunity on 20 minutes following more good work on the right flank from Saric, shooting wide from 12 yards out.

However, North Shore wouldn't have to wait much longer for the opener. They were in front midway through the first half, Saric scoring with the simplest of finishes from Marquin Smith's cross.

It would be 2-0 in the 28th minute after Jesse Piriz played a precise long pass over the top of the Mounties backline. Mitchell Smith did what he does best, shielding the ball from two opponents before sending a low shot past the goalkeeper to take his season tally to 19 goals.

Mounties responded, and on the half hour a long Peter Triantis free kick was tipped over the crossbar by Ryan Wood. Triantis would pick out Theo Kofinas a minute later, with Wood making another save.

This game had really come to life, and Saric was denied by Blake Tuxford soon afterwards, the Mounties goalkeeper getting fingertips to his 20 yard free kick. Mounties threatened twice more as Joshua Viera tested Wood from 30 yards, and Benjamin Spruce headed wide from a Triantis corner kick.

As halftime approached, Tuxford would be needed again, and he parried a Ricky Woodward effort before rushing out to push the loose ball away from Lindsay.

The second half was just as eventful as the first. On 56 minutes, Brian Jamba got away from two defenders and set up Marquin Smith, who hit the side netting. Saric would fire wide moments later, while at the other end Wood continued to come up big between the sticks, first getting down well to tip a Mitchell Davidson shot wide, and then saving from Noah Chianese.

Those saves were vital, and North Shore would make the game safe with two goals in quick succession. It was 3-0 in the 65th minute when Saric sent Tuxford the wrong way from the spot after Cheng had been fouled in the area. Cheng grabbed a goal of his own 60 seconds later, sprinting onto a lovely chipped through ball from Marquin Smith and tucking the ball away.

Having scored twice, Saric nearly set up a goal on 73 minutes. The Mariners winger beat an opponent in the area and cut the ball back for Marquin Smith, whose effort was blocked.

To their credit, Mounties kept pushing. 12 minutes remained when Michael Cklamovski showed great skill to control Anthony Schmidt's cross, but his square ball into the middle somehow evaded three of his teammates. They had another chance in the 86th minute as Tai Smith chested a Matthew West cross to Michael Jeffrey, however Wood was able to tip the shot over the crossbar.

However, the evening belonged to North Shore, and in the final minute Eve displayed his shooting technique once again, coming up with a contender for Goal Of The Season. The Mariners midfielder was in space just outside the area when a Nathan Separovic corner kick was cleared straight to him and he took full advantage, sending an unstoppable shot into the top corner.

The weekend's results mean that the top two sides in the regular season will face off on Saturday. Both North Shore and Hills are at the top of their game, and after two close contests between those two earlier in the year, we look set for a memorable Grand Final.

North Shore Mariners: 1. Ryan WOOD, 2. Rainer SMAHEL (5. Harrison QUIRK 82'), 3. Chris LINDSAY (11. Nathan SEPAROVIC 88'), 6. Ricky WOODWARD (c), 8. Brian JAMBA, 10. Marquin SMITH (15. Joshua MBAKWE 74'), 12. Braden CHENG, 14. Jesse PIRIZ, 18. Mitchel SMITH, 19. Daniel SARIC, 22. Sean EVE

Mounties Wanderers: 1. Blake TUXFORD, 3. Benjamin SPRUCE (7. Matthew WEST 77'), 4. Jacob POSCOLIERO, 9. Tai SMITH, 10. Joshua VIERA (2. Anthony SCHMIDT 70'), 11. Mitchell DAVIDSON, 14. Noah CHIANESE, 16. Michael JEFFREY, 17. Theo KOFINAS (c). 18. Michael CKLAMOVSKI, 26. Peter TRIANTIS (8. Bruno PIVATO 64')