



By George Stavroulakis

# WOLLONGONG WOLVES V CANBERRA OLYMPIC

Saturday 21st September

Albert Butler Park – 3pm

*\*To be streamed live on [www.nationalpremierleagues.com.au](http://www.nationalpremierleagues.com.au)*

Albert Butler Park will be full of energy this Saturday as NPL NSW Men's Premiers Wollongong Wolves will lock horns with the NPL Capital Football's best in Canberra Olympic as round 1 of the 2019 NPL Finals Series takes centre stage.

**Luke Wilkshire** and his troops have been on hiatus for the last two weeks after winning the Premiership by a margin of nine points, only to be bundled out of the NPL NSW Finals Series after successive losses to overall Champions APIA Leichhardt Tigers and Sydney United 58.

**Canberra Olympic**, after winning their respective Premiership, also suffered the same fate as the Wolves as they were knocked out of the finals series which was last weekend won by Gungahlin United.

**Since their** shock Finals departure, the Wolves have been busily training and playing friendly clashes against A-League opposition, preparing for their big NPL Finals Series clash against a hungry Canberra Olympic outfit coached by Frank

Cachia.

**Going Into** the match as clear favourites, the Wolves are hoping they can represent NSW with pride by bringing back the NPL Finals Trophy to the state as well as locking down a round of 32 FFA Cup spot in 2020.

**One key** figure that will surely be in and amongst the action is Wolves' star attacker and recently crowned Gold Medal Player of the Year, Thomas James.

**The 26-year-old** had an outstanding season and was rewarded for his efforts at the recent Gold Medal dinner not only scooping the Player of the Year award but the Golden Boot as well.

**No stranger** to playing opposition in Canberra, James was this year plucked from the NPLACT competition as he played for Olympic's rivals Canberra FC in 2018.

**Asked what** his thoughts were going into this match, James was full of confidence.

**"I can** see us breezing past Canberra Olympic," he told Football NSW.

**"This is** where it gets tricky, but I see us in the NPL Finals taking on Campbelltown City."

**Beaming from** a solid year, James stated his high hopes for the club's run in the NPL Finals Series and even mentioned how the actual NPL Finals Series match will play out.



**"The NPL** Finals Series will end dramatically as we will score a last-minute winner courtesy of Taylor McDonald who will be on the end of a sublime cross by me," he cheekily stated.

**Canberra Olympic** by no means will be a pushover and do possess a few stars of their own, one in particular being former Australian Youth International Kofi Danning who will look at stinging the net on Saturday.

**He, along** with prolific marksman Stephen Domenici, young gun Nick Faust, Daniel Sparrow and Nik Popovich will be thriving on the 'underdogs' tag in hoping they can stun the Wolves.

**The winner** of this clash that kicks off at 3pm will face the winner of either Victorian top guns Heidelberg United or Football West's Perth SC in the semi-final with the other matches seeing Maitland battling Devonport Strikers and Lions FC taking on Campbelltown City.

# STAJCIC: IT WAS AN UGLY GOAL!

**Central Coast** Mariners coach Alen Stajcic has labelled Abraham Majok's winner against Hume City as "ugly", but believes his improving side is on the right track and will be competitive in the A-League this season.

**The Mariners** are through to the FFA Cup semi-finals after knocking off Hume 1-0.

**It is** only the second time that the Central Coast has ever reached the final four of the Cup.

**Stajcic described** Majok's stoppage time goal at John Ilhan Memorial Reserve as "one of the ugliest" he's witnessed.

**"I thought** the goal was ugly – it's probably one of the ugliest I've seen," he said.

**"[But] we** improved as the game worn on and certainly in the second half we got on top of Hume. So that was pleasing. Some of our build up, creativity and our forward runs in the second half were much better.

**"But certainly** our play in the front third and in the penalty



box needs to improve if we're going to be competitive in the A-League. Some of the delivery and finishing was poor.

**"It just** wasn't clinical enough for this level. But there was a lot of pleasing aspects.

**"Hume are** a very good team, they're probably the best NPL team in the country in playing out. Their structures and their

patterns of play are fantastic, so full credit to them.

**"They're** a great team but I'm really pleased we got through it."

**The Mariners** have struggled for several years and took out the wooden spoon last season.

**But Stajcic** feels belief is growing within the club and the signs for the 2019/2020 campaign are good.

**"This team** is a new team, three quarters of it have been put together," he said.

**"This pre-season** has been really important, we keep improving every week. There's so much room for growth. We know the potential of these players... It's one step at a time, baby steps for us.

**"Every win** we take, every FFA Cup match and every A-League match and friendly match is important for us to build the belief and confidence, not only in the playing group but in the staff, in the whole club, in the fans. We want everyone to start believing in this group of players.