



By George Stavroulakis

NEWCASTLE JETS EYE YOUNG SOCCEROO CLASH

Newcastle Jets may face the Young Socceroos in their final warm-up match before the start of the new A-League season.

The Jets kick off their A-League campaign against Central Coast Mariners on October 19, as they have a bye in round one.

The Hunter outfit has notched up draws against Sydney FC, Western Sydney Wanderers, and Perth Glory in the past few months, along with losses to Brisbane Roar and Adelaide United, and a victory over Melbourne Victory.

Further planned friendlies with Melbourne City and Central Coast have been scrapped at the last moment over the cost of the City clash and the closeness of the A-League game with the Mariners.

Newcastle have already played nine matches in total in pre-season, which coach Ernie Merrick is happy with, but could face off against Gary van Egmond's Under-20s before the season begins.

"We may have a game against them," Merrick said. "But that's not confirmed. If we do that will be our last game.

:We've played nine matches, six of them against A-League sides. I'm pretty happy with the way we've been playing.

"The next two weeks will be high-intensity training, two



squads of 10 against 10.

"We're happy with the way the pre-season has gone. So the last couple of weeks will just be intensive training, and in the last week or so taper down."

Merrick is pleased with the squad he has assembled and should have a full roster to choose for their opener, apart from injured number 10 Wes Hoolahan.

"We've got a strong defence, a good midfield, we just need the strikers to finish things off," he said.

"We've got to play with the strengths that we have. We're back to a more traditional front three and that got us into a grand final. We'll just have about everyone ready for the first game, except for Wes."

Merrick said new recruit Bobby Burns, who has joined the Jets from Scottish club Hearts, will compete with John Koutrombis for the starting left back position.

"Bobby, he loves the weather but he's struggling to train in the heat," he said.

"[But] he's fitted in really well. He's a nice lad who plays good football. He's a tough little fella. He came as a back-up, a left-sided player. I guess it's just competition with for that left-sided spot.

"We've also got Lachlan Jackson who can play on the left."

No World Cup for us: Junior Matildas outclassed by DPR Korea

She loss means Australia fail to qualify for the 2020 U/17 World Cup in India, with Asia's normal allocation of three qualification spots altered due to the automatic reservation for the hosts.

DPR Korea, meanwhile, will be hoping to add a third trophy to their cabinet in India, showing every bit of their quality against the Aussies, with two first-half goals to Hye Yong Kim providing the damage.

Pom I Kim then gave the scoreline a more accurate reflection of the Koreans' dominance, with a third goal in extra time.

Australia looked out of their depth in the first half, consistently pushed back to their goal-line and failing to clear the half-way mark with a series of errant passes.

The second half defensive performance improved, but shots or a thread of successful passes were few and far between, casting doubt over Australia's ability to match it with the very best in the world at youth level.

JETS IMPORT HOOLAHAN OUT UNTIL

Newcastle Jets marquee man Wes Hoolahan is set to be sidelined until the new year after undergoing surgery on his right ankle.

The former Republic of Ireland international was injured in the Jets' FFA Cup quarter-final loss to Adelaide last week.

The A-League club confirmed on Monday scans had revealed the 37-year-old had suffered major ligament and cartilage damage to which required surgery.

The ex-Premier League midfielder underwent the surgery in Sydney on Monday and the Jets say he's set for a significant stint out.

"Estimated return to play timeframes will be established by the club's medical staff in consultation with the surgeon," the club said in a statement.

The news is a huge setback for Ernie Merrick with the Jets investing heavily to lure the veteran ex-Norwich City player to Australia on a free transfer in August.

Newcastle have the bye in the opening round of the A-League and open their season in an F3 derby against Central Coast on Saturday, October 19.

