



EARLWOOD WANDERERS UNDER 16/1A REACH THE NSW GRAND FINAL OF THE CHAMPIONS OF CHAMPIONS AFTER A THRILLING EXTRA TIME WIN

By Theo Fotopoulos

Earlwood Wanderers Under 16/1A's Boys Team reach the Football NSW Grand Final in a thrilling extra time Semi Final penalty shoot-out win against Forest Killarney FC

"The road to the grand final for the team has been tough, as is to be expected from such a prestigious tournament, but deserved" said an Earlwood spokesperson.

The Earlwood Wanderers Football Club is now just one win away from winning their first male Champions of Champions tournament since 2011.

Christos Tatsis was part of that 2011 U11's EWFC Championship winning team, and has been part of the journey with this year's finalists as he supports his

younger brother, Apostolos, playing with Earlwood's U16/1's as they compete for the title of Champions.

Earlwood's goalkeeper, Michael Maher, secured the victory against Forest Killarney which was decided through a penalty shootout following a 1-1 draw at the end of regular and extra time.

By making a number of brilliant saves, Michael was swamped by teammates as his final save wrapped up the shoot-out and the win 3-1.

In contrast, Earlwood's penalty takers, Apostolos Tatsis, Connor Stock and Chris Theodorou, were clinical with their finishes, scoring all shots taken.

James Melki scored the game's opening goal in the 9th minute to give Earlwood the lead which they held for most of the match, before Forest Killarney equalised in the 50th minute.

Both sides created a number of chances and were it not for goal line saves and defensive plays from Jono Tapia, Toby Robertson, Aidan Passell, Carlos Tobiano

and Stef Ottavio, the end result could have been quite different. It was a similar case on the other end, where goal line saves, crossbar hits and near misses from Oscar Swan, Adrian Cambria, Louis Williamson, Daniel Odria and Juan Arango kept the result level for the whole match.

Both teams displayed great sportsmanship, desire and effort. Earlwood Wanderers now face University Of Wollongong's U16's on Sunday 20th October in the Football NSW Champion of Champions Grand Final.

Western off mark amid A-League acrimony

Mark Rudan and Andrew Durante both copped it from the Wellington boo-boys but left New Zealand with a win for new club Western United.

Rudan spent an off-season in the spotlight after his A-League defection from Wellington Phoenix.

But on Sunday night he returned to Westpac Stadium, where he was booed, jeered, and even dodged a flag or two flung from the stands. "It was quite clear what my role was going to be coming back here," Rudan said after overseeing a 1-0 win.

"And that was fine. We work in the entertainment industry.

"No issue. No problem. No dramas. It's to be expected. All good. All part of the fun, isn't it?"

In fact, Rudan believed it may have helped his side engineer the first-up success.

Western United were only admitted to the league in December last year, and have had to build a professional organisation from the ground up since then.

So if Rudan being target allowed his players to avoid scrutiny in the

build-up to the match, he was delighted to shoulder the load.

"All that other stuff, it allowed my players to go out there and do their job without any problems or issues," he said.

"That's my job. It's my job to protect my players and my football club as well. That's what I do."

The most savage attack from the stands was a banner that read "One Thief, Three Traitors," a dig at Rudan and departing players led by Andrew Durante.

Durante spent the last 11 years at the club as captain and is their A-League appearance record-holder with 273 matches for the Phoenix.

The 37-year-old was also booed when he was on the ball; but the Yellow Fever relented after the final whistle by applauding and singing his name.

One-season Phoenix coach Rudan said their differing lengths of tenure deserved different



treatment.

"He's a legend, an absolute legend here," he said.

"This guy's has given his heart and soul to football club for 11 years. He deserved what he got at the end."

Western head back to Victoria on Monday having banked a critical three points in their historic first clash.

They will now enjoy four of their next five games at home, Geelong's GMHBA Stadium, beginning with

Perth Glory on Sunday.

"Every coach in the league will tell you just how hard this place is to come and get anything," Rudan said.

"Momentum is good. Belief is important."