



By George Stavroulakis

# GABRIEL POPOVIC DEBUTS

Perth coach Tony Popovic was a proud father on Saturday as he handed 16-year-old son Gabriel his A-League debut at McDonald Jones Stadium.



**It was** a special moment for the Popovic family as Gabriel became the second brother to make his debut for Glory after older brother Kristian did so in April.

**Tony** - their father, former Socceroo and now their A-League coach - introduced Gabriel late in Saturday night's match against Newcastle after star Diego Castro levelled the scores at 1-1.

**«It was** a special moment for him. For all of us who have been lucky enough to play the game, you always remember your debut. So for him, it's a special moment and, for us as a family, it's a special moment,» Popovic said.

**The powerfully** built teen was thrown immediately into the action as defender Alex Grant was red-carded and the Glory were forced to defend a hungry Jets side in the dying minutes.

**«The boy** did good. He came on in the end, he had a couple of aspects of the game quickly. One moment you're on top, the send-off obviously changes things,» Popovic said, stopping short of confirming his son would see more

game time as the season went on.

**«The kid's** made his debut; he's been training with us; he's trying to juggle his year-11 exams and football. So it's not easy for the kid but he's very happy.

**«He's lucky,** he has a top coaching staff who give him a lot of support and senior players that make it so enjoyable at training for him to learn. It's a great learning environment. It's just the start for him so let's see how far it goes.»

**Older brother** Kristian made his A-League debut aged 17, but scored his first goal for the club in October against Western United.

**It was** a moment Popovic described as unique, and he reiterated the sentiment on Saturday night for his younger son.

**«I said** this when Kristian scored the goal in Melbourne away, I never envisaged coaching them at this level and I never envisaged them playing in a team that I was coaching professionally,» he said.

**«But it's** happened, and I've got full support from the club because they can see they're good young talented

players. They're not alone, they're my sons, so it is unique, but we have a good group of young guys coming through. **«The future** looks good for the football club. The now is about performances and results but we have an eye on the short, medium and long term for our football club, so it's exciting.»

**Perth Glory** has had an unfortunate history with coaches playing their children in the past however.

**Steve McMahon** insisted on playing his son Steve McMahon Junior in Glory's A-League debut season until he was sacked. McMahon Jr never played professional football again. His father never coached again.

**Later Glory** coach Alistair Edwards also came under intense pressure over his choice of fielding sons Cameron and Ryan ahead of other players until he too was sacked. Cameron now plays in the NPL while Ryan subsequently enjoyed success in Scotland and now plays for Burton Albion. Their father has never coached again, moving instead into technical director roles at two Malaysian clubs.

“**Ernie Merrick..**  
“If we keep playing like that, we will win games”



**Newcastle coach** Ernie Merrick remains confident the A-League season isn't getting away from the Jets despite not winning a game so far.

**Sitting second** last on the ladder after four games, the Jets are struggling for goals and desperately need a win to kick-start their campaign.

**After Saturday's** 1-1 draw with Perth Glory at McDonald Jones Stadium, Merrick said the Jets were nearing their best football and not far off the best teams in the competition. **«We've only** played four games - most teams have played five,» he said. «If we keep playing like that, we will win games and the quality of the performance was brilliant.»

**The Jets** have scored just four goals all season, and were again cruelled out of three competition points with a late goal from the Glory's Diego Castro.

**They will** face league newcomers Western United on Saturday at GMHBA Stadium and, despite their strong start to the season, Merrick is confident the Jets can win.

**«I've had** a good look at them (United),» he said.

**«As I've** said, I don't think there's any team going to break away substantially. I know Melbourne City are at the top of the ladder just now and Western United has had a good start, but I think it will be a very tight competition which is good for the crowds.

**«I don't** think there's any team that's going to get away.

**«The best** team we've played so far is Sydney and that was at their home and we didn't play so well. I don't think there's any standout team so far.»

## Macarthur FC A-League, W-League & NYL Teams To Share Campbelltown Stadium

**Macarthur FC** executive chairman Rabieh Krayem says the club is aiming to launch its W-League team by 2021 and will play out of Campbelltown Stadium.

**Mr Krayem** told FNR the club's A-League, W-League and National Youth League teams will play out of the same venue and will have their own sections in the club's centre of excellence.

**«Our W-League** team we're looking at 2021 and we're looking for a National Youth League team next year, so that is the plan to move forward,» he said.

**«Campbelltown Stadium** is our home ground and that's where everyone will be playing.

**«It will** be [a base], it's important as a club there is no difference between the male, female or the academy.

**«Home is** Campbelltown Stadium and we have to treat everybody equally, the centre of excellence that we're building will have special permits built for our W-League team as it will our youth team, as well as the indigenous community and of course our A-League side.»

**As revealed** by The Sydney Morning Herald,

the club will pay just one-dollar to hire the stadium and have agreed a ten-year lease with the council.

**The club** will also drive the new Charles Perkins Soccer Academy, which will provide indigenous and Torres Strait Islander footballers the opportunity to pursue a career in the game.

**Former Socceroo's** coach Frank Farina was appointed the academy's director of football, with the board being made up of Roy Ah See, Richard McGuinness, Danielle Mate Sullivan, Bonita Mersiades and Professor Michelle Trudgett.

**«The Charles** Perkins Soccer Academy has been long overdue and it's about doing something I think football has done poorly with the indigenous game and that's uniting it together,» Mr Krayem said.

**«Frank Farina's** role as director of football in the academy is to work with football clubs, associations and A-League clubs across the board to see how we can work smarter and how we can unite the game and get its fair share of corporate support and government funding, for what has been lacking in our game for the last 15-20 years.