



By George Stavroulakis



MARINERS LOCK DOWN TYRO

Young midfielder Gianni Stensness has signed a contract extension with Central Coast Mariners to keep him at the club until 2022.

Stensness came through the North Shore Mariners and the Mariners' academy, but debuted in the A-League last season for Wellington Phoenix.

The 20-year-old joined Central Coast this August and has featured in all seven A-League games for the club this campaign. **"I'm very** happy to have extended my time with the Mariners," Stensness said. "It has been a great few months since joining the club which has encouraged me to extend.

"The club has believed in me, and I've thrived off that, and I want to continue to be in that positive environment."

Born and raised in Australia, but with a New Zealand father,

the defensive midfielder has made four appearances for the New Zealand Under-20s.

Stensness said he is keen to give back to the Mariners.

"It's special for me to extend my contract with a club that played a significant role in my development," he said.

"I want to give back to the club not only for their recent support and belief in me, but also for my time in the youth ranks here.

"I look forward to further growing as a player here and doing my part to grow the team, get results, and strive to get this club back to its former glory.

"It's a particularly positive environment that Staj has encouraged

and fostered, he believes in young players, and wants a fit, energetic playing group."

Central Coast coach Alen Stajcic praised the impact of Stensness so far this season.

"As a club we're very excited to have extended Gianni, and having come on trial a few months ago to now being an integral part of our starting XI it's clear he has a bright future here," Stajcic said.

"The Central Coast Mariners Academy provided a launching pad for Gianni earlier in his career, and it's great to see another young player shining on the professional stage after being given a chance here."

SYDNEY FC PREPARE FOR BATTLE TO KEEP OFF - CONTRACT STARS

SYDNEY FC CEO DANNY TOWNSEND SAYS THE CLUB WON'T BOLSTER ITS SQUAD IN JANUARY - AND IS FOCUSING ON STOPPING ITS EXISTING PLAYERS BEING SNATCHED BY RIVALS,



Sydney has a long list of off-contract talent including several key big name stars.

Goalkeeper Andrew Redmayne, Milos Ninkovic, Luke Brattan, Michael Zullo, Paolo Retre, Ryan Teague, Marco Tilio and Harry Van Der Saag all are coming to the end of their contracts at the Sky Blues.

Milos Ninkovic will make a decision on his future next week after being approached by A-League newcomers Macarthur Bulls while Adam Le Fondre is expected to extend his stay later this season.

Townsend told FTBL that "pretty much everyone" had shown interest in Luke Brattan and Michael Zullo.

However, FTBL understands that initial interest from England for fringe Socceroos goalkeeper Andrew Redmayne has cooled.

"Every one of our off-contract players is in demand from A-League clubs, that's the way it is," Townsend told FTBL.

"We've got a laundry list of clubs that want to talk to our players, but we haven't sent any letters out because we're happy with the players we've got."

Last year Sydney FC acquired Iranian striker Reza Goochenejad on a short-term deal to bolster their squad for the Asian Champions League.

But so far the club has no plans for another Asian signing ahead of next year's campaign, which has seen them drawn against Ange Postecoglou's Yokohama F Marinos.

"Last year Reza was opportunistic," said Townsend. "We weren't aggressively looking to bring anyone in, we had a balanced squad and Reza became available, him being an

Asian player helped us."

It'll be a busy start to the decade for Sydney FC as they also are revving their engines on the site for their new Centre of Excellence.

Tempe Reserve has emerged as Sydney FC's third potential site for a training centre which FTBL revealed the club want to move into in 2021.

"Inner West Council outlined a potential road map," said Townsend. "There's obviously hurdles you've got to get across in order to meet community consultation.

"At the end of the day we are going into a community environment and you want to take the community with you."

Sydney FC aim to settle on a site for a training centre in early 2020.