



By George Stavroulakis

A-LEAGUE ROUND 17 PREVIEW: MELBOURNE VICTORY STARS MARCO ROJAS, TIM HOOGLAND IN DOUBT, LEIGH BROXHAM INJURED

DESPITE A ROUSING CHAMPIONS LEAGUE QUALIFYING WIN, AN INJURY HAS GIVEN MELBOURNE VICTORY A SHOT IN THE ARM AMID A STUTTERING A-LEAGUE CAMPAIGN. MEANWHILE, TWO OF THEIR BIGGEST STARS ARE IN DOUBT.

Melbourne Victory capped off a mega week for Australia in Asia, by securing a famous Champions League qualifying win.

Andrew Nabbout's deflected second half winner sealed a 1-0 win away to Japan's most successful club, eight-time J1 League and 2018 continental champions Kashima Antlers – after an arduous trip.

It comes in the wake of the Olyroos breaking a 12-year Olympic drought, after beating Uzbekistan on Sunday to secure the third and final Asian spot in the 16-team tournament.

Graham Arnold yesterday praised A-League clubs' contribution and the Socceroos/Olyroos boss will now be watching the A-League Under 23s intently, before Tokyo 2020 kicks off on July 24.

"Our achievement would not have been possible without the assistance of clubs in Australia and overseas, and likewise we believe that the players involved have returned to their clubs as better players mentally and physically having gained experience at a significant international competition," Arnold said.

The kids of Victory, Sydney FC and Perth Glory have an added chance to impress Arnold, with minimum six group games – eight if they reach the Champions League knockout phase, in June.

Victory's interim boss Carlos Salvachua delivered a win that brings him right into the reckoning for a permanent deal, delivering a first away Asian win in 23 away games.

Starting with captain Ola Toivonen on the bench in a trip that included a six-hour flight delay from Melbourne, the day after Victory's 3-0 A-League loss to Sydney FC, Salvachua paid tribute to his players.

"It is really important for the club to be in the Champions (League) as well as the players and the group. The most important thing was the attitude of the players, it was unbelievable,"

Salvachua said.

"We had to be compact because we were tired, after the games and the long trip. I'm really proud and happy with all the work of the players."

ROUND 17 PREVIEW

NEWCASTLE JETS V WESTERN UNITED

Hunter Stadium, Saturday, 5pm

TAB Odds: Jets \$2.25, Draw \$3.50, United \$3

DAVUTOVIC'S VERDICT: 1-1 DRAW

ADELAIDE UNITED V MELBOURNE CITY

Coopers Stadium, Saturday, 7.30pm

TAB Odds: Adelaide \$2.50, Draw \$3.50, City \$2.70

Melbourne City's Olyroos trio Connor Metcalfe, Tom Glover and Dennis Genreau look set to return to the squad for the visit to Adelaide United.

Midfielder Metcalfe is the biggest chance to start in a match where City has revenge on its mind, after copping a 4-0 hammering from United at the same venue in the FFA Cup final last October.

Mark Viduka medallist Al Hassan Toure, who was also part of the Olyroos' Thailand success, has been ruled out indefinitely after suffering a stress fracture in his right foot.

Fifth-place United could draw to within three points of City, with a game in hand, and Gertjan Verbeek's side is buoyed after substitute Nathan Konstandopoulos' late strike in the 4-3 win away to Western United.

DAVUTOVIC'S VERDICT: Adelaide United 2-1 Melbourne City



Melbourne Victory's busy run of fixtures continues with a trip to Perth Glory in the Hyundai A-League on Saturday.



Andrew Nabbout was the hero in Victory's historic win

MORE FOOTBALLER NEWS

PERTH GLORY V MELBOURNE VICT.

HBF Park, Saturday, 9.45pm

TAB Odds: Glory \$1.75, Draw \$4, Victory \$4.20

Returning Marco Rojas and Tim Hoogland will be tested on Thursday before a decision is made on their availability for Saturday's visit to Perth Glory.

Victory faces a race against the clock to sign a replacement for Olyroos defender Tommy Deng, who was sold to Japanese club Urawa Red Diamonds.

Leigh Broxham is suspended for the Glory clash, although he would have missed anyway after straining his calf in the Asian Champions League win on Tuesday night, which has given Victory a shot in the arm amid a stuttering A-League campaign.

Victory's squad returns to Melbourne this morning, and interim boss Carlos Salvachua will oversee a light session on Friday before they depart for WA.

Captain Ola Toivonen could come into the XI after coming off the bench in the dying minutes of the Kashima win, while Victory is

adopting a cautious approach with Rojas.

DAVUTOVIC'S VERDICT: Perth Glory 3-1 Melbourne Victory

OTHER GAMES

SYDNEY FC V BRISBANE ROAR

Jubilee Stadium, Friday, 7:30pm

CENTRAL COAST MARINERS V WESTERN SYDNEY WANDERERS

Central Coast Stadium, Sunday, 4pm

A-LEAGUE LADDER

1	Sydney FC	12W 1D 1L	+20	37 pts
2	Melbourne City	8W 3D 4L	+7	27 pts
3	Perth Glory	7W 4D 3L	+13	25 pts
4	Wellington Phoenix	7W 3D 5L	+4	24 pts
5	Adelaide United	7W 0D 7L	0	21 pts
6	Western United	15 6W 2D 7L	+1	20 pts

7	Brisbane Roar	5W 4D 5L	-3	19 pts
8	Melbourne Victory	4W 3D 8L	-5	15pts
9	Western Sydney	4W 2D 8L	-7	14pts
10	Central Coast	4W 1D 9L	-12	13pts
11	Newcastle Jets	2W 3D 9L	-18	9pts

