



By George Stavroulakis

THIERRY IRADUKUNDA SET FOR WESTERN UNITED DEBUT, JAMIE MACLAREN CLEARED OF INJURY

HE'S THE YOUNG GUN WHO HAS RUFFLED PLENTY OF FEATHERS AT WESTERN UNITED AND NOW THE N'GOLO KANTE DOPPELGANGER IS SET TO MAKE HIS A-LEAGUE DEBUT IN WESTERN UNITED'S CLASH WITH BRISBANE ROAR.



Thierry Iradukunda looks set to make his A-League debut for Western United.

United coach Mark Rudan revealed that the Burundi born midfielder had stamped his mark since arriving from Melbourne Victory. **"Thierry is** a very quiet lad off the park but was determined. He got on the wrong side of (Panagiotis) Kone very quickly, biting at his heels every moment," Rudan said.

"I like that, got no problems when a player's doing that. Young kids on trial can be too kind and take time to get out of their shell – he was fearless.

"He kept nailing players, tackling away – had to work on his distribution, first touch and body positioning. He's come on in leaps and bounds in all those areas.

"We call him Kante. When I asked do you know him, he said (Kante's) a player he likes to model himself on.

MORE FOOTBALL NEWS

"Very similar to Kante in that he's unassuming and quiet off the park.

"Every morning we shake each other's hands and he'd mumble 'good morning', the words wouldn't come out. You'd have to ask him a few times."

United has added Japanese-capped defender Tomoki Imai with Brendan Hamill (knee) out for the season, Connor Chapman and Ersan Gulum heading abroad and Aaron Calver still

a fortnight away.

"Tomoki's a great age, lots of good attributes, good on the ball, quick, powerful, can play right back, defensive midfielder or stopper, ticks a lot of boxes," Rudan said.

MACLAREN CLEARED OF INJURY

Socceroos striker Jamie Maclaren has been cleared the travel to New Zealand for Melbourne City, who are edging closer to having their full compliment of players.

Only defenders Richard Windbichler, Jack Hendry (injured) and Harrison Delbridge (suspended) are absent, with midfielder Connor Metcalfe and keeper Dean Bouzanis set to return to the squad.

Wellington Phoenix, one of the A-League's surprise packets under rookie coach Ufuk Talay, could prove stiff opposition for a second-place City which is just a point ahead of Perth Glory.

Maclaren, who netted his 14th goal of the season last week, twinged his hamstring celebrating City's second goal in last week's 2-1 derby win over Melbourne Victory, but has been cleared of injury.

He labelled it a huge win for City.

"It was a massive win, we know ourselves



AUSSIE TAKES OVER ENGLISH CLUB

FORMER CRONULLA SHARKS CHAIRMAN DAMIAN IRVINE HAS BEEN APPOINTED CEO OF ENGLISH NATIONAL LEAGUE CLUB EBBSFLEET UNITED.

Irvine, who has worked in English football in commercial roles previously with Notts County and Wycombe Wanderers, will take over the day-to-day running of the club.

The Australian, who previously headed up National League North side Bradford Park Avenue, is an experienced sports administrator.

The 74-year-old club was previously known as Gravesend & Northfleet FC until 2007 and plays in the fifth tier.

The Fleet are currently 23rd in the 24-team league and are fighting relegation. **"The appointment** of Damian as new CEO heralds a new era for the football club," Ebbsfleet owner and chairman Dr Abdulla Al-Humaidi said in a statement.

"Damian has the proven track record to

bring stability and growth to Ebbsfleet United. I would also hope this appointment serves to reiterate my continued commitment to our great club."

Irvine posted on social media: "Football ownership, especially for foreigners in the UK, is a thankless and difficult task and it's fair to say things have hit rocky shores for 'The Fleet' and its supporters and players' relationship with their owner over recent years.

"It's never simple and never straight forward and I walk into another club needing some attention and care as it faces a relegation battle.

"I met the staff today and they're wonderful proper football people and we will give this a shake. It helps to have climbed out of holes before and I can show them the way."

we've been inconsistent, we go to Wellington with some confidence even though they're playing some good stuff," Maclaren said.

NEW-LOOK UNITED PUZZLE COMPLETE

New Japanese signing Tomoki Imai completes Western United's mid-season overhaul, as they attempt to crack the top six in their debut campaign.

The Japan-capped ex-Matsumoto Yamaga, Kashiwa Reysol and Omiya Ardija defender could debut in Sunday's clash with Brisbane Roar, joining fellow defenders Tomislav Uskok and Oskar Dillon as recent signings.

Connor Chapman and Ersan Gulum were sold abroad in January, while Brendan Hamill (knee) is out for the season and Aaron Calver is still a fortnight away.

"Tomoki's a great age, lots of good attributes, good on the ball, quick, powerful, can play right back, defensive midfielder or stopper, ticks a lot of boxes," Rudan said.

"We want to become a bit more dynamic. It (defence) is also an area we need to strengthen with Hamill and Calver going down in the same game.

"We signed Uskok, are we putting too much pressure on Oskar Dillon?"

A-LEAGUE FIXTURES

WELLINGTON P. v MELBOURNE CITY



United coach Mark Rudan says Thierry Iradukunda bears a resemblance to Chelsea's French midfielder N'golo Kante.

Eden Park, Saturday, 5pm
TAB Odds: Phoenix \$2.70, Draw \$3.40, City \$2.50

DAVUTOVIC'S VERDICT: 1-1 DRAW

WESTERN UNITED v BRISBANE ROAR
Mars Stadium, Sunday, 4pm
TAB Odds: United \$2.50, Draw \$3.40, Roar \$2.70

ADELAIDE UNITED v CENTRAL COAST
Coopers Stadium, Friday, 7.30pm
TAB Odds: Adelaide \$1.45, Draw \$5, Mariners \$6.50

DAVUTOVIC'S VERDICT: Adelaide Utd 3-1

WESTERN SYDNEY v NEWCASTLE JETS
Bankwest Stadium, Saturday, 7.30pm
TAB Odds: Wanderers \$2.15, Draw \$3.65, Jets \$3.20
DAVUTOVIC'S VERDICT: Wanderers 2-1