

NO ILL-FEELING AS ROAR FACE WESTERN UNITED



BRISBANE ROAR IMPORT JAY O'SHEA HAS PLAYED DOWN ANY ILL-FEELING BETWEEN HIS TEAM AND A-LEAGUE NEWCOMERS WESTERN UNITED HEADING INTO THIS WEEKEND'S KEY MATCH.

When Roar faced the A-League expansion club in their only previous meeting in December, Western United coach Mark Rudan got into a spat with Brisbane officials after his team had claimed a 2-0 win at Suncorp Stadium.

Rudan claimed he had been "disrespected" by Roar coach Robbie Fowler, who had not shaken his hand after the match, and then got into a verbal altercation with Roar chief executive David Pourre which Fowler labelled "disgraceful".

The tensions between the two clubs have only increased with Roar recruit Scott McDonald unable to face his former team after United insisted on a clause in the ex-Socceroo forward's contract forbidding him

to play in Sunday's match at Mars Stadium in Ballarat.

With Roar's 2-1 win over Adelaide last weekend allowing Fowler's team to leapfrog United into sixth place on the competition ladder, Sunday's game has plenty riding on it, although O'Shea was quick to play down any festering rivalry.

"I think everything will be alright," the Irish midfielder said.

"Things in football are quickly forgotten about and I think there'll be handshakes. It'll be a good game and I'm looking forward to it."

Roar's run of just one defeat in their past

seven matches since that December reverse against United has put the team firmly in finals contention.

O'Shea, who has created more A-League chances than any player this season, believes that surge in form is a result of the team finding its feet under Fowler after a major squad overhaul in the off-season.

"We're starting to see the fruits of all the work that we've done at the start of the season," the Irishman said. "Everything's starting to gel now."

"Obviously it was a brand new squad, new staff and everything like that. It was always going to take a little bit of time."



UNBEATEN CHINA ARE AIMING TO THROW A SPANNER IN THE WORKS FOR THE MATILDAS' TOKYO OLYMPICS HOPES WITH AN UPSET WIN IN THEIR FINAL GROUP QUALIFIER IN SYDNEY.

CHINA BLOCK EASIER TOKYO ROAD FOR MATILDAS

After smashing 13 goals past Taiwan and Thailand, Australia will confront a resolute China as they fight to avoid an Olympic qualifying play-off with South Korea. The Matildas can travel an easier road to Tokyo with a win or draw against the also unbeaten Steel Roses in Thursday night's blockbuster clash at Parramatta.

Top of Group B on goal difference, sharing the points would be enough for Australia to face world No.32 Vietnam in a two-leg, home-and-away play-off to clinch a berth in Japan.

But should the Matildas slip up at Bankwest Stadium, 20th-ranked South Korea would be awaiting them in the final knockout stage.

If history is any guide, China could pose Australia a few problems.

Four years ago, the Asian powerhouses ground out a 1-1 draw at the same stage of qualifying for the Rio 2016 Olympic Games.

The Matildas again struggled to break down China at the 2018 Algarve Cup, before eventually triumphing 2-0. Midfielder Chloe Logarzo scored the opener that day

and is adamant Australia will not be caught on the back foot against tough opposition.

"For the first time going into a major tournament, I don't think there's any complacency," she said on Wednesday.

"It's important that we play at the highest level ... as if we're at the Olympics already."

"If you do it at the highest standard for long periods of time, that's when perfection comes."

The newly-signed Bristol City midfielder says Australia will not tinker with their winning formula despite China representing a step-up in class from their previous two fixtures.

"There's no difference between preparing for China or preparing against Thailand," Logarzo said.

"It's the exact same process. We focus on ourselves more than we focus on the other team."

Matildas coach Ante Milcic has mixed and matched his squad so far, springing six changes for Monday's win over Thailand in a bid to ensure the squad remains fresh ahead of their toughest test yet.



Hat-trick queens Emily van Egmond and Caitlin Foord have carried the bulk of the scoring load, with skipper Sam Kerr getting limited game time as she recovers from a quad injury.

But Milcic could be ready to unleash Kerr for a full 90 minutes after his prized Chelsea star impressed in two bench cameos.

Depleted China, meanwhile, has opted for continuity in Australia after a turbulent tournament lead-in, sticking with the same starting 11 for both matches.

Despite missing key players Wang Shuang and Yao Wei, quarantined in the city of Wuhan due to the outbreak of the coronavirus, the Steel Roses have shown they still pack a lethal punch up front.

Forwards Tang Jiali and Wang Shanshan, as well as veteran Li Ying, have hit the scoresheet with three goals apiece.

Ma Jun (three assists) has kept things ticking over nicely in the middle of the park for China, while central defenders Lin Yuping and Wu Haiyan have only allowed a measly two shots on target all tournament, conceding one goal.