

GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED

Football Federation Australia (FFA) today advised that, after considered discussion with its nine State and Territory Member Federations and assessment of developments today, sanctioned grassroots football competitions and associated training would be suspended for the next four weeks.

The decision will take effect from 12:00am on Wednesday, 18 March 2020 until Tuesday, 14 April 2020.

The decision comes as the latest in a series of measures being introduced by the FFA to combat the ongoing spread of COVID-19 following the announcement of its COVID-19 Guidelines yesterday and places the concerns, health and wellbeing of the Australian football and wider community as the highest priority.

FFA Chief Executive Officer James Johnson explained that while disappointing, reducing community gatherings would help slow the spread of the virus and that this was the driving factor in the decision.



He may be a 10-cap Socceroo but Michael Zullo accepts he may not immediately snatch the Sydney FC starting jersey from teenage full-back Joel King.

Experienced left-back, Zullo, has appeared in five matches for the Premiers elect in 2019/20, making only two starts, after suffering a series of injuries.

The 31-year-old has returned to training after an eight-week recovery from a calf issue he aggravated, having being kept sidelined earlier in the season with a stomach bug and a quad injury.

Those set-backs forced head coach Steve Corica into



"Our decision today follows extensive discussions with all of Australia's nine State and Territory Member Federations, taking into consideration the latest feedback from all levels of the football community," Johnson said.

"We are also taking into consideration the ongoing response by both the broader international and Australian communities which is evolving almost

on an hourly basis now.

"We also recognise that there have been some recent material developments which have changed the landscape significantly, including the decisions made by the Victorian and ACT Governments to declare States of Emergency late yesterday afternoon. Today, more schools, universities and also public sporting facilities have announced that they will be closing so we have had to respond quickly to this.

"It is very regrettable that grassroots football will not proceed for the next month, but as a good and responsible citizen, we recognise that our game of approximately 1.96 million participants has a significant role to play in slowing the

spread of the virus.

"More Australians play grassroots football than any other team sport in the country and we have been able to listen to the voice of our community, through the establishment of the National COVID-19 Working Committee and our Guidelines, who have expressed a desire to contribute more to the nation at this time through a unified and Whole of Game response.

"As a game we need to be responsive and agile in how we deal with this situation, and we are working together around the clock to deal with this challenge. We will continue to assess our position regularly to ensure that it is reflective of the most accurate state of affairs and views of the game.

"I would like to acknowledge how Member Federations have worked so constructively with FFA, through the Working Committee and established Guidelines, to arrive at what is right for our players, coaches, officials, their families and the wider community. We are meeting on a daily basis and will continue to do so, taking into account the latest Government medical advice and community sentiment."

FFA will continue to communicate new developments in the lead-up to 14 April 2020.

ZULLO EXPECTS BATTLE TO PLAY PART IN SYDNEY FC'S PREMIERSHIP MARCH

handing King a lengthy run in the starting line-up, which the youngster has grabbed with both hands across his 17 matches.

And the two-time Hyundai A-League Premier, and two-time Champion, is accepting the reality that he may not walk straight back into the Sky Blues team for the crucial run-in.

"The team has been doing really well so I'm not really in a position to demand anything."

"I'm just looking forward to enjoying myself on the field again and doing what I love," Zullo told sydneyfc.com

Among their sensational run of recording 15 wins in 19 matches, the one thing Corica's side are yet to achieve this season is a victory against their bitter rivals Western Sydney Wanderers.

Sydney FC's only two defeats in 2019/20 have come against their crosstown antagonists, both 1-0 losses, and Zullo is desperate to pull on the Sky Blue jersey for their third instalment of the trilogy.

"I would like to play against the Wanderers on the weekend

but that's up to head coach Steve Corica," Zullo said.

"I feel good now, I feel like I've done a really thorough rehab program.

"It's been one step at a time and it's really pushed me into uncomfortable territory, there's been some really hard training sessions."

While Zullo has been putting in the hard yards, the defending Hyundai A-Champions have positioned themselves three wins away from getting their hands back on the Premiers Plate.

Although Zullo has not been a huge part of that accomplishment on the field, he has been there every step of the way and cannot wait to play his part in Sydney FC's Championship defence.

"For a fan the climax of the week is going to the game and watching your team win, and for a player it's the same," Zullo said.

"I've had to step back and be a fan, obviously the boys are top of the league and playing some exceptional football, and now I just want to be able to contribute in some way this season."