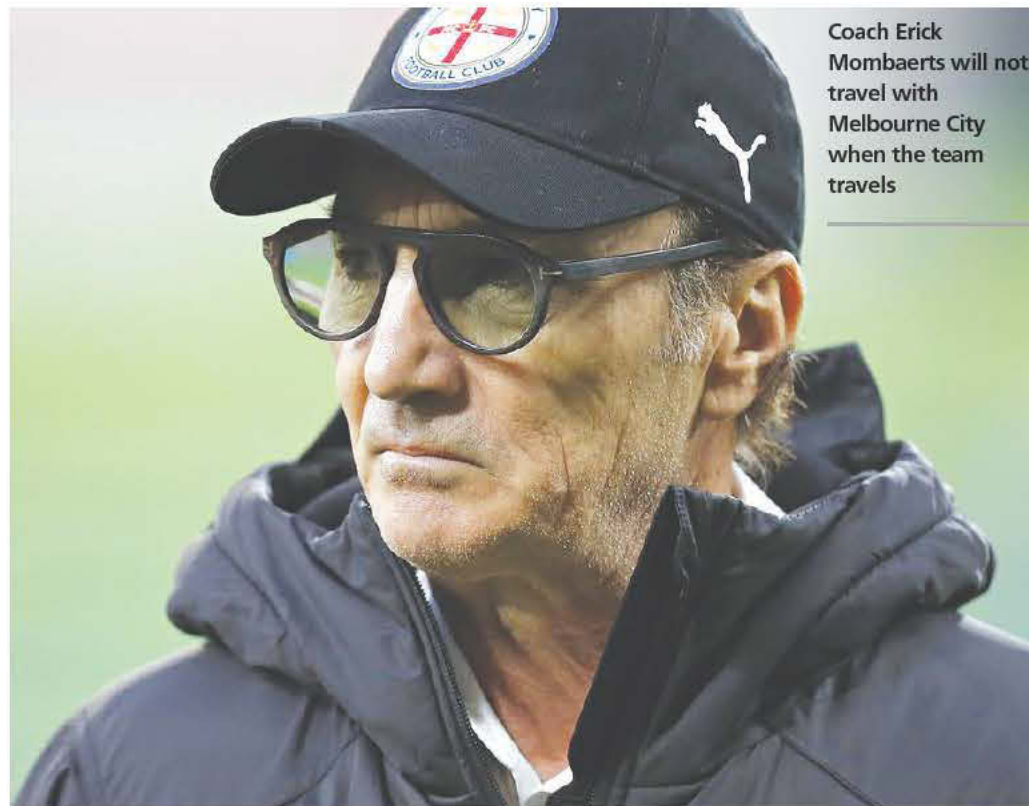


HEALTH AND WELFARE IS A PRIORITY FOR ALL AT THE MOMENT WHICH IS WHY MELBOURNE CITY HAS ENDORSED COACH ERICK MOMBAERTS' DECISION NOT TO TRAVEL FOR THE TWO REMAINING AWAY GAMES.

MELBOURNE CITY COACH ERICK MOMBAERTS MAKES CALL NOT TO TRAVEL FOR AWAY GAMES DUE TO AGE



Coach Erick Mombaerts will not travel with Melbourne City when the team travels

Melbourne City coach Erick Mombaerts will not travel to the Central Coast or Newcastle for the A-League club's final two away games of the regular season, amid the coronavirus outbreak.

Assistant Patrick Kisnorbo will take the reins for away games against the Mariners on Friday and Jets on Monday with 64-year-old Mombaerts preferring not to travel because of his age a stance supported by City.

Mombaerts will coach City in their final three regular-season games in Victoria against Adelaide United, Western United and Sydney FC.

Former Socceroo Kisnorbo enjoyed a strong career overseas including a long stint at Leicester City, then Leeds, before captaining City in the A-League.

After retiring in 2016, he became a youth team assistant coach, along with assistant coach of the W-League side. He then took the reins of the W-League team in 2017 and won the 2017-18 championship.

INCENTIVE FOR SKY BLUES TO DELIVER

The carrot of winning a Premiers Plate as quickly as possible before any potential shutdown of the A-League will motivate runaway A-League leader Sydney heading into a possible fixture logjam.

The Sky Blues hold a 10-point lead over second-placed Melbourne City with two games in hand and need only eight more points to secure a record fourth plate and their third in the past four seasons.

Third-placed Wellington, the only other team with any slight hope of catching the Sky Blues are another point back and played a game more.

Wellington's away match against Sydney on Wednesday was postponed as the squad serves a two-week isolation period after arriving in Australia.

With the coronavirus situation, the FFA has already signalled its intention of compressing the remaining games of the season into a few weeks.

Sydney defender Ryan McGowan stressed the Sky Blues had plenty of incentive going into Saturday's derby against the Wanderers at Bankwest Stadium.

"We have that carrot dangling of a couple of wins and the whole season has been a huge success in winning the Premiers Plate," McGowan said.

"We're going to be coming into a very difficult period in terms of the number of games in the amount of weeks, but that's probably why it's been good that we have the points on the board.

"We've got a little gap and we want to be trying to win the games as quickly as possible, because with fatigue, or with however they are going to put these fixtures, it could become quite difficult towards the end of the season."

WANDERERS HOLD SYDNEY TO A-LEAGUE DRAW

A battling Western Sydney Wanderers scored a deserved but fortunate late equaliser to hold A-League leaders Sydney to a 1-1 draw in a fast-paced derby unlike any they have previously played.

Englishman Adam Le Fondre's 35th-minute tap-in looked set to earn Sydney maximum points on Saturday, but a dominant second-half effort from Wanderers was rewarded.

An 82nd-minute Simon Cox shot from outside the penalty area took a heavy deflection off Kwame Yeboah, which Sydney goalkeeper Andrew Redmayne had no chance of saving.

Cox and substitute Mo Adam went close for Wanderers in the last few minutes of a match watched live in 30 countries, many of which have suspended their own domestic competition due to coronavirus concerns.

Wanderers started the better of the two teams and also had a large portion of play in the second half of a game, played with typical derby intensity despite the absence of spectators.

Fans' noise that has been a feature of all previous Sydney derbies was missed, as only the voices of the players and those on the bench reverberated around the near-empty stadium.

Sydney moved eight points clear of second-placed Melbourne City, who have played two more games **Wanderers remain** eighth, but the point moved them to within one spot of sixth.

"We caused them a lot of problems in possession of the ball, we had a lot of shots," Wanderers' coach Jean-Paul de Marigny said.

"They are a good side and I felt in the second half we had control of the game and they were there for the taking

"Just a little bit more quality in the last key pass or crosses, could have hurt them much more, but I thought without the ball the discipline and desire to win the contest was phenomenal."

Wanderers harried Sydney early with their high press, but couldn't turn that into shots on target.

Sydney worked their way into the game after the first 15 minutes as playmakers Milos Ninkovic and Alexander Baumjohann exerted more influence, though that waned after halftime

Both sides had a number of first-half shots, but Le Fondre pounced to score his 17th goal of the campaign, after Daniel Lopar pushed a Kosta Barbarouses shot into his path



Shots and chances were less frequent in the second half.

Wanderers' Daniel Georgievski curled a fierce shot just wide and Sydney substitute Harry Van Der Saag was off target on a rare attack by the visitors.

Sydney coach Steve Corica said his team defended too deep in the second half and wanted them play more balls in behind the Wanderers defence rather than to feet.

"We gave the ball away too easily, we just made the wrong decision at the wrong time," Corica said.

"I thought they were better than us in the second half. The first half we were very good, but we wanted to go on with that in the second half and we didn't get that."

Western Sydney won this season's two previous derbies 1-0 and are the only team Sydney have not beaten this season.