



By George Stavroulakis

# THE NPL NSW MEN'S STAR TACKLING COVID-19 HEAD ON

By Mark Stavroulakis

You may know him as one of the most fiercest defenders in the National Premier Leagues NSW Men's competition having played for the likes of the Sutherland Sharks and now Wollongong Wolves, but now tough tackling Nick Littler is fighting a different kind of battle away from the football pitch and that's being at the frontline battling COVID-19 as a registered nurse at the St George Hospital.

**Littler is** one of over 100,000 registered nurses in NSW currently working around the clock at the St George Hospital in the respiratory ward which has transformed to the COVID-19 ward.

**"This COVID-19** virus has definitely affected me personally.

**"As mentioned,** I am a registered nurse and have been for the last six years.

**"I am** currently at St George Hospital and I am working in the newly created COVID-19 ward dealing with patients suffering with the illness and respiratory issues."

**Football has** taken a back seat since the sport amongst many others suspended activity, but the 28-year-old has been on the go assisting people in desperate need of survival.

**"Since the** football lockdown I have been working (and stressing) about COVID-19.

**"It's been** non-stop, I mean at time's it's

difficult not knowing how bad the day will be but I'm just so thankful that I am still able to work and hopefully make a difference to all the people out there suffering from COVID-19 and to also provide for my family."

**Th fear** of catching it himself has of course crossed the Wolves star's mind but high level monitoring has assured he has kept it at bay.

**"Yeah 100%** I know of think with the amount of people getting it and how quickly its spreading, it's kind of inevitable that I will get it.

**"Obviously we** do everything in our power not to but definitely there is always that fear there."

**Littler, amidst** all the chaos, has managed to fit in some fitness time around his very hectic schedule keeping the body fit and the mind sane along with spending time with his lovely young family.

**"For obvious** reasons it's not been easy to



stay fit apart from being run off my feet at work.

**"I've been** doing some running just to keep ticking over while the NPL season is on hold.

**"I also** get some time to run around and kick a ball in the backyard with my daughter.

**"Spending some** really nice quality time with my wife Britt and my 2 kids Isla, she's 3 and Henry who is 8 months has also been amazing."

**You could** forgive Littler for not thinking about football too much but the 'big man' who was one of the key players that steered the Wolves to Premiership and NPL Glory in 2019 knows that the absence of football has been evident in more ways than one.

**"I'll tell** you what I miss most about our game, winning.

**"Coming off** our season last year and winning like we did.

**"I miss** being able to do that every weekend. **"Also the** banter in the team, we have a great bunch of lads and I'm actually missing not seeing them 4-5 times a week."

**Asked what** his message was to the NPL NSW Football family regarding taking safety measures to minimise the spread, Littler did not mince his words.

**"We have** to do what's been asked of us, social distancing and staying at home are the 2 most important things that someone can do at the moment.

**"I've seen** how bad this virus can be and the last thing I want to see is more people dying from it.

**"So I want** to stress how vital it is that those who can stay at home! Please!"

**On behalf** of the football family, Nick you are a real hero, keep fighting the fight we all applaud you.

# MASTRANTONIO: "I HAVE NO INCOME COMING IN FOR WHO KNOWS"

By Mark Stavroulakis

She was tipped as one of the biggest signings in the National Premier Leagues NSW top tier Women's competition, but alas her debut with the APIA Leichhardt side has been put on ice as former Western Sydney Wanderers midfielder Ella Mastrantonio, like many footballers, waits on the side-lines due to the COVID-19 epidemic.

**Having been** capped six times with the Matildas, Ella was one of the Wanderers' shining lights in what was a huge year for the club reaching the finals series of the W-League this season.

**APIA scooped** on their prized signing and had her wearing her new colours at one of the final public gatherings at the club's season launch but that's been as far as she's gone with her new teammates.

**"It's crazy** what is happening at the moment and how far and wide this virus has affected so many people.

**"The majority** of the population, especially in football, the toughest aspect has been to stay indoors as footballers with no real training which has hurt.

**"I have** been trying to keep my mind busy with colouring in books and TV shows

though.

**"In the** income department it's been quite scary as I have no income coming in for who knows how long?

**"I have** even applied for Woolworths and heard nothing back so far because so many people are in the same boat as me.

**"It's a** hard and scary time for many that's for sure."

**Ella has** however maintained her focus on staying fit and ready regardless of the obstacles our current climate is experiencing. **"I have** been staying fit and moving as much as I possibly can.

**"I've been** doing runs up and down my street as there is a big hill in the middle of it which helps break out the sweat and have also been doing a lot of home workouts.

**"I don't** have much equipment to work



with so I am using anything I can from paint cans to chairs, I do have a few spare cones that I have kept."

**The 28-year-old** thinks the world of her beloved football and is waiting for the day to be able to continue on with playing her dream sport albeit with her new APIA colours.

**"I miss** everything about football, but what I miss most about it is the ability to train so you can improve yourself as an even better footballer than you were the day before.

**"Being part** of a team is also something special in our game."

**The former** W-League star was to the point about the virus and issued the challenge to everyone to 'Stay at home'.

**"The most** important thing is to stay home, literally.

**"You could** be carrying the sickness and wouldn't even know and could pass it on to someone more vulnerable than you.

**"Please stay** home, the quicker everyone does the quicker we can all get back to normal lives.

**"My thoughts** are with everyone affected by COVID-19."