

MELBOURNE KNIGHTS CALLS FOR AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL TO UNITE AND REFORM

Melbourne Knights have declared that the ongoing COVID-19 crisis represents Australian football's moment to unite and move forward.

In a 'letter to the footballing public' posted on their website, the former NSL Champions and current NPL Victoria side became the latest in a string of high-profile voices to call for football to use the ongoing COVID-19 crisis as a platform to assess its preferred direction and how it intends to get there.

In the letter, Knights, whose favourite son Mark Viduka headlines the FFA's recently announced 'Starting XI' advisory panel of Australian football legends, make clear their wish to see Australian football use the ongoing crisis as a chance to pull in a unified direction for reform and express a desire for the Sunshine-based club to be a part of that.

It's the latest in a string of releases put out by the club seeking to contribute to the discourse surrounding the direction of the game, with Knights having released its own, alternative Whole of Football Plan in 2015 and a



response to the National Second Division Working Group's white paper in 2019.

"This break has given us all time for pause and reflection," Knights' letter reads. "Even amongst those in the highest offices in the sport, it is unanimously agreed that football in this country has reached a crossroads.

"We believe we all want something fairly similar: a united game, pulling in the same direction, pushing for new heights.

"The silver lining to these difficult months is that all of us in society have realised what we can achieve together is far greater than what we can achieve divided. Put simply - we will never fulfil our potential when we remain so disconnected.

"Should we continue with our existing approach - stalemated and inward-looking as Australia's only major truly global sport - there is no chance of progress. As a game, it is clear that every inch of energy has been exhausted and the A-League which has taken up the overwhelming majority of that energy has nonetheless ground to a halt.

"Disappointed as much as the Melbourne Knights have been to have been excluded from the pinnacle of the sport for almost two decades, we still aspire to be

part of the movement that re-energises not only the A-League but the entire Australian football ecosystem. "For that to happen, clubs like ours want to and need to start giving again to Australian football. Our history and culture is well-documented and we are thrilled that our contribution is being recognised within the court of public opinion. But now, we want to help lead and deliver, more than ever before."

Founded in 1953, Knights - then known as Melbourne Croatia - joined the NSL in 1984 and secured back-to-back championships in 1994/95 and 1995/96. Since the collapse of the competition, the club has resided in the Victorian State Leagues; winning a Dockerty Cup in 2014 but yet to reascend to the summit of a state they won three titles in before joining the NSL.

Though still one of the most famous names in Australian football, national exposure for the club has in recent years been restricted to the FFA Cup, with Knights knocked out in the Round of 32 of the 2019 iteration by eventual champions Adelaide United in front of 4087 fans at Knights Stadium.

The club has made no secret of its desire to return to the Australian football national scene; providing one of the loudest voices in support of the introduction of a second-tier below the A-League and the eventual introduction of promotion and relegation into the ecosystem.

VERBEEK DEPARTS AS ADELAIDE UTD COACH

Adelaide United and coach Gertjan Verbeek have parted ways, the Dutchman citing uncertainty caused by the coronavirus pandemic which has shut down the A-League.

United was insecure," Verbeek said in a statement on Wednesday.

"The coronavirus has made it a very difficult and insecure situation for everyone but I hope the team, the staff, and everyone's families all remain safe and healthy during these challenging times."

Verbeek and the majority of Adelaide's coaching and administration staff, along with all players, have been stood down since the league was placed on hold because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Five rounds, plus finals, remain in the season with A-League hierarchy still holding out hope of completing the league.

Verbeek's assistant Carl Veart was expected to take over as head coach should the season resume.

United chairman Piet van der Pol said the club also wouldn't be renewing the contract of performance coach Gerald Sibon.

Sibon - a Dutchman who, like Verbeek, had returned to the Netherlands - falls off-contract at season's end.

Van der Pol didn't rule out more changes to Adelaide's coaching ranks.

"In due course we will assess the situation and will make the appropriate coaching staff decision based on the status of the league," he said.



Dutchman Gertjan Verbeek has quit as coach of A-League club Adelaide United.

Verbeek, who returned to the Netherlands amid the league's suspension of competition, asked to be released less than a year into his two-year contract.

Citing uncertainty caused by the coronavirus pandemic, Verbeek said he and the club "mutually agreed" to split.

Given a number of reasons, such as the global health problems, future of the league, difficult financial situation of the club and the need to protect and care for my family, my future as head coach at Adelaide