

WE LOVE LUCI!

By Adam Coleman

Recently, I found myself chatting to Strikers' assistant coach Luciano Trani after he had finished a high intensity training session down at Shaw Park.

But here is where the traditional structure of the interview changed. Over the course of the following two hours, as junior football players from the local club (and their parents) arrived for their night training session, we found ourselves having a great chat about the club and the game at large.

Sometimes, you enjoy the quality of conversation so much that to pause to write down almost seems to ruin the moment. The interview ends and a good old chinwag starts.

But, before you gloss over this piece to read the other articles, let me get to my point. Chatting to Luciano, you really understand the reasons why we all feel passionate about the Strikers and the game on the whole.

Firstly, we chatted about the progress of the team after a challenging pre-season. After five rounds of the NSL, which have seen us gain eight hard-earned points, the Strikers have conceded just three goals (including our first consecutive clean-sheets in over three seasons). They have shattered the perception of the so-called football experts who knocked down the Strikers before a ball was kicked.

Luciano is very happy with how the team has gone thus far, a view echoed by supporters and journalists alike. He sees the Strikers as a fantastic team unit, where there are no egos, and everyone there works hard to improve the team, not just the individual.

We obviously talked about individual players (their roles, skills, and strengths) As I had just seen the team play full-tilt on a half-sized football field I could see what he's talking about.

This should increase the Strikers speed with general play, as they play with an intensity not dissimilar to the pace of futsal.

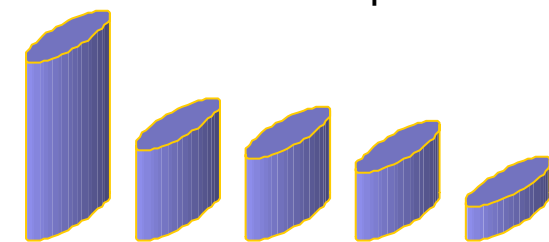
With a frugal defence, Luciano sees that as an important early strategic victory, one that will continue to reap dividends as the season continues.

As we all recall, the 1997 Championship team was built on a strong defensive line. Now, with Kearton, McLaren, Dodd and McLoughan, the process of taking an untested back line and developing them in a short time has certainly worked thus far.

With height, technique and speed, it will also allow the Strikers to develop into the best counter-attacking side when the finals roll around in March. The speed of the counter attack has been evident at each of the Strikers' home games so far and should produce some more fantastic football.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON

Current Top 5



Dodd McLaren Pilic Grierson McKay

MAN OF THE MATCH

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Looking over the first quarter of the season, Luciano stated "Across the games played thus far, the team had achieved its game plans for all but 45 minutes of the season - the first half of the Adelaide United game".

After last season's collapses, it certainly is great to see the old mistakes isolated, worked upon and practically eliminated. Obviously, there are the teething problems on the attacking end.

This team contains a strike force of young talented local players, with reputations brought from Brisbane's best premier clubs, and isn't just built on one or two forwards, but potentially a team of varied scoring threats.

We also chatted about Luciano's adaptation to the Brisbane lifestyle. You see, this is Luciano's first move away from his beloved Melbourne. Away from the city where he was born, raised and achieved his successes in football, at both playing and coaching levels.

He's certainly settled into his new surroundings, and he thanks everyone (players, administration and supporters alike) for making his transition flawless.

Looking to the future, Luciano would love to see the Strikers be the team that can find young Queensland football talent, develop them through the joys of childhood play, the toughness of teenage competition and the eventual arrival at the Strikers as Queensland players who can lead the great game for years to come.

In conclusion, if you get the opportunity, take the time to have a chat to Luciano, Stuey or any of the players after a game. The BSSA exists to provide that bridge of communication, and we hope that occasions like this will encourage you - the supporter - to be an even greater part of this club.

Free Kick DODD SWEEPS AWAY MISFORTUNE

By Steve Pitman

Some supporters might be surprised to learn that the player at the heart of a Brisbane Strikers defence that has conceded only three goals in five games this season is not a wily old NSL veteran, but a 22-year-old recruited from the Queensland Premier League only two months ago. His name is Karl Dodd.

Dodd came to the Strikers after stints at Sydney's Sutherland Sharks and Bonnyrigg White Eagles and Queensland Premier League sides Wynnum Wolves and Gold Coast City (Palm Beach).

While playing for Gold Coast City, Dodd was asked by former Strikers coach John Kosmina to trial with his team last summer. Kosmina was ready to sign him, but then Dodd badly injured his knee and underwent a knee reconstruction.

Dodd last week passed off his earlier misfortune with a simple remark. "It makes you stronger", he said. Maybe so, but you must have the strength within you to make that true. "The recovery from that operation normally takes six to twelve months, but I worked really hard and was back in five months", he said. "I was really keen to get back in to the NSL".

His hard work and tenacity were rewarded by new Strikers player-coach, Stuart McLaren, who had seen enough to know he wanted Dodd in his team. In no time at all, Dodd has made the sweeper position in McLaren's back three his own with a series of nerveless displays that have belied his NSL inexperience.

Dodd's on-field presence and composure hint of a confident young man and the player him-

self, while insisting he is only keeping things simple, confirms this.

"You've always got to have confidence in your own ability", he said. "I looked at the players in the NSL and thought 'those players are not out of my league' - it's just a matter of hard work and consistency. I'm just doing the basics - I like the free role, but I have to be mistake free - but I do put myself above any player I play against. You have to".

It's just as well he does, for Dodd has quickly found himself duelling with deadly forwards like Perth's Damian Mori and South Melbourne's Vaughan Coveny. "I look forward to challenges like that", he said. "There are quality players in every game. But the players around me, like Jason Kearton, Stuart McLaren and Josh McCloughan, are quality defenders and keepers and it's not about me marking players. In my position, it's about picking up the scraps".

Despite adapting quickly, Dodd admitted there is one aspect of playing in the NSL that has made him wonder if he should pinch himself. The transition from playing before a few hundred spectators in the QPL to playing in front of almost 16,000 fans a fortnight ago in Adelaide has been dizzying.

"Yeah", he said. "We were waiting for about ten minutes before the kick-off while they did all the pre-game things, and you look around and you think 'you watch this on TV - what are you doing here'? The atmosphere was awesome. It was really intimidating to start off, but when the game got going, I forgot about it and just concentrated on what I was



Karl Dodd

doing".

Concentration, and spotting trouble and dealing with it before it happens, are essential ingredients of Dodd's role in the team. When asked if, for inspiration, he models himself on any player Dodd gave some interesting insights into what shapes him.

Unsurprisingly, he initially nominated AC Milan's regal sweeper, Franco Baresi and former Socceroo Charlie Yankos. But, perhaps less predictably, he also reserved a special mention for his tough-as-teak former Gold Coast City, and now Brisbane Strikers team mate Josh McCloughan. "He will go through anything for you, and I try to model myself off him", Dodd said.

Stuart McLaren said before the season began that he wanted to build a team of 'silk and steel'. Perhaps, in Karl Dodd, he has found it all in one package.

TOKESI'S EXPERIENCE A BLESSING TO STRIKERS' YOUTH!

By Evan Askew

In May, 1975 Brisbane City full-back Peter Tokesi, in one of his first forays into football coaching, took a Brisbane U-13 side to Sydney for a trial. Normally there would be nothing unique about this - except that it was his honeymoon! Given that sort of devotion to the development of young football talent in Queensland, one can only have the highest optimism for the fate of the Brisbane Strikers youth team who are playing under Tokesi in their inaugural NYL season.

Having finished a successful playing career for Brisbane City, (with the highlights being two Phillips Cup wins in the NSL in the late 1970s), Across the Waves (Bundaberg) and Queensland, Tokesi was drawn back into coaching juniors by another local soccer identity, Tony Lowndes. "Once I stopped playing I felt I needed a bit of time to myself, so he conned me into doing one night a week", Tokesi recalls.

He went on to accumulate over

20 years of coaching experience at Brisbane North and Queensland junior level and at senior level, including stints at Brisbane City, Wynnum and as the Strikers' assistant coach.

It is his experience in the local youth scene, however, that will be crucial in making a success of his position as Strikers youth coach, to which he was appointed on 8 September. In fact, it has already been important in helping him to complete the difficult task of having a squad picked and ready to play Northern Spirit by 21 September.

Overall, Tokesi is happy with the players at his disposal, believing his squad is superior to the Brisbane Toro side he coached in the NSL youth competition two years ago. He is particularly impressed with their competitiveness, as they kept things close with both

Northern Spirit and Sydney Olympic in the first two

rounds with only minimal preparation. He was also impressed with their improvement in two consecutive victories over Canberra Deakin and the QAS but stresses the need for further improvement in some areas, including their first touch - because they are now going to be playing against better class defenders - and speed over the first one or two metres.

Tokesi's goal with the youth team is to develop individuals to become good enough to play for the senior team. While he would like to think that every player can make it, he places special emphasis on players being able to take knock-backs and emerge as better players. He uses the message: "Take the knock-backs and go back and ask yourself, what do I need to do to get picked"?

He also likes players who have a good attitude and the will to win. "I particularly look for a player who will help me when we're losing one or two nil."

Tokesi believes his appointment can help mend burnt bridges with the local soccer community. He says he will focus on working together with Bruce Stowell at the QAS to ensure that the maximum numbers of young Queensland players are developed. While this may be controversial, he said that "if there was a player that Bruce was interested in I would be quite happy to let him have first preference. Without discussion, players may be missed".

With his lengthy experience in coaching young Queensland footballers, Tokesi seems the ideal guardian for the future of the Brisbane Strikers youth program. Coupled with his knowledge and connections in Queensland we can look forward confidently to the youth of the Strikers developing in the coming years.

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CROOK TRANSFORMS NSL 'EASYBEATS'

By Steve Pitman

Despite being located in an area long regarded as one of Australia's football heartlands, Newcastle United (and its fore-runner the Newcastle Breakers) has until recently been one of the NSL's perennial strugglers.

In eight seasons up to 1998/99, the best placing Newcastle had achieved in the NSL was eighth - which meant they had never played in a finals series. In 1999/2000, under the coaching of Lee Sterrey, they got ever-so-close before a late form slump saw them finish seventh after they appeared to have a finals place sewn up. The following season saw a return to 'business as usual' and the club finished fourteenth. Sterrey then departed amid acrimony with the club's management.

His replacement was former Tottenham Hotspurs, Norwich and Northern Spirit player Ian Crook. Under Crook, who was given a bigger budget than any of his predecessors, Newcastle improved dramatically in 2001/02 to finish second on the NSL table before missing out

on a grand final spot to the eventual winners, Sydney Olympic.

As if to prove this effort was no fluke, Crook's team backed it up last season by finishing fourth. The message was out - Newcastle could no longer be thought of as NSL easybeats.

Despite the loss of Joel Griffiths, Travis Dodd, Matthew Bingley, Scott Baillie, Chris Zoricich and Daniel Beltrame, and a horrible trot with injuries, United have again begun well this season. They went through their first five fixtures unbeaten, and led the NSL table until two weeks ago. Since then, consecutive losses to South Melbourne and Adelaide United - the latter in hurtful circumstances after holding a 2-0 lead - have taken the gloss off things, but Newcastle will still be tough opposition for the Brisbane Strikers tonight.

Like the Strikers, Newcastle have a predominantly young squad built around a nucleus of quality, experienced players. The experience is provided by

Strikers Vs Newcastle



	P	W	D	L
Overall	15	5	5	5
Home	8	3	3	2

	GF	GA	Pts
Overall	26	18	20
Home	19	10	12

the likes of Milan Blagojevic, Robbie Middleby, Scott Thomas and Peter Tsekenis across the midfield, Craig Deans at the back and Esala Masi up front.

It is Newcastle's younger brigade, however, that has captured the headlines for the club so far this season. Jobe Wheelhouse got amongst the early goals and earned himself selection in the Australian Under 20s squad alongside Brisbane Strikers Matthew McKay and Wayne Heath. Ryan Griffiths, now out of the shadow of his elder brother Joel,

has also begun to blossom and got on the scoresheet against Adelaide United last week. And local product and former Young Socceroo, Greg Owens, is another who has been in good form since returning after a couple of successful seasons with Sydney Olympic.

The Brisbane Strikers can expect to face a team that will fight for every scrap of possession it can get and attack with pace and purpose. Blagojevic will probably anchor the midfield, feeding the likes of Ryan Griffiths and Middleby, whose pace will be used to unsettle the Brisbane Strikers defence out wide. Masi, who invariably plays well in Brisbane, will be the main target man and be expected either to hold the ball up for his team mates or convert the crosses from out wide.

If Newcastle are to have problems, however, it could be at the back - their mainly youthful defenders have struggled over the past two weeks and conceded a total of seven goals to South Melbourne and Adelaide United.

THE ONE WHO DIDN'T GET AWAY

By Vitor Sobral

Queensland football fans will be all too familiar with a disease that plagues football in this state. The plague referred to, is that of the dreaded rich southern clubs stealing our most talented players, with their best years still ahead of them. However there is one young player who is in no rush to leave the team who launched his NSL career. Daniel Dreger is one of the most committed and loyal young men in the NSL. His insistence on declaring his loyalty to the Brisbane Strikers is a unique quality, rare in football today. "The club has been my family...I don't want to leave Brisbane".

The boy from Bowen didn't grow up in a football family, but from the age of 10 Dreger took to football and never looked back. His early days with Bowen Junior Football Club proved that he had special talent, and at the tender age of 14 he was picked up by the Mackay Wanderers Youth side in the North Queensland Super League. After only a few games of youth football under his belt, Dreger was promoted to the senior side. With the limited competition in North Queensland, Dreger was advised to head south, to further his football career.

Palm Beach-Currumbin High School, and its soccer excellence program, was Dreger's next port of call. It was certainly an unenviable task to leave home at just 15. "It was pretty tough being away from my family, but after the first 12 months I was resigned to the fact that I would have to leave home

eventually anyway". After impressive performances for local sides such as, Broadbeach, Gold Coast City, and Burleigh Heads, Dreger formed part of the Queensland side which won the national titles in 1996. "It was a pretty special team, that Queensland side, with the likes of Jade North, Wayne Srhoj, Jon McKain, and Adam Webber".

Dreger would soon join his team mates from the Queensland side, by accepting the scholarship offered by the QAS. After only two seasons with the QAS, John Kosmina called up, the then teenager, into his match squad for an away game against Canberra. "I didn't get on the park against Canberra but it was an excellent experience". Dreger would get his chance in some trial games, in which he shone. From here on he would always form part of the Strikers squad, and even took Shane Stefanutto's position for a period of time. "I played the last 10 games of that season at left back, which kept Stef out and moved Meredith into midfield".

The 21 year old is however, still waiting for his chance to cement a spot in the starting eleven, but there is no doubt that when it comes he will grab it with both hands, "I'll just keep working hard at training, and make sure I take the opportunity when it arises".

In keeping with Dreger's loyalty and commitment to the club, his goals are to notch up 50 appearances for the Strikers, and eventually win a title with the club he calls home. "I

want to get my 50 appearances up for the club, and perhaps win a title with Brisbane... there is no reason why we can't win the title".

Daniel Dreger's versatility is certainly an asset to McLaren's squad. His attitude towards the club and the game in general is exemplary. It will only be a matter of time before we see Dreger demonstrating his ability on the field with the first team. Until such time we can be thankful that Queensland hasn't let this young talent slip through their fingers.



Daniel Dreger

MIDFIELD BATTLE LOOMS

By Vitor Sobral

Football supporters in Brisbane will be licking their lips at the prospect of witnessing the Strikers take to the field after three enduring weeks without top flight action.

Their opponents on Saturday night will be Newcastle United, who after two straight losses will be determined to head back home with a positive result.

Brisbane lost their first game of the season during the trip to Adelaide, and Strikers boss Stuart McLaren is adamant his players will do everything in their power to make up for this loss with a win at home.

"You could here a pin drop in the dressing room after the game...the boys will be determined to get the first win at home this week". McLaren feels the game was lost by allowing too much room for the Adelaide midfield to work their magic and handing over possession cheaply.

Giving a team like Newcastle freedom in midfield and possession of the ball could prove fatal, however McLaren recognizes this threat. "We will be concentrating on making sure that we do take simple options, and keep possession".

Newcastle has conceded no less the seven goals in their last two matches, and Brisbane

will surely want to take advantage of the vulnerability shown by Newcastle at the back.

However the fact remains that the Strikers have found it difficult in front of goal this season. "We have changed the system of play from previous seasons, so as the players need to get more familiar with that, and with the return of Royce Brownlie, we hopefully can rectify that".

Even with the difficulties Brisbane are having in finding the back of the net, McLaren sees no reason to change the team's tactics. "We will be sticking with what has been working for us so far this season, but we make a few minor adjustments to neutralise Newcastle's strengths".

These strengths will certainly include the form of young Adam Griffiths and veteran Robbie Middleby, whom McLaren signalled out as the danger players for Newcastle.

The contest between the two slightly contrasting styles will prove to be an interesting match up. Newcastle is renowned for their spreading of the play with short passing movements, and their patience in the build up of play will be difficult to deal with. Brisbane, on the other hand, has proven to be resilient in defence, but have also shown

they can string good passes together when the mood takes them.

McLaren believes the battle for midfield possession will prove decisive in determining the winner. "You can dictate a game or be dictated to, but what happens in the middle of the park...so if we can get enough ball into our midfield and they can produce the quality that they are capable of, then we can end up passing Newcastle off the park".

Brisbane has been playing some delightful football so far this season, yet the fact remains the team is still yet to win a home fixture this season. McLaren considers the game against Newcastle to be one in which Strikers fans will go home celebrating. "I am very confident we will get our first home win on Saturday night".

After three painstaking weeks without Brisbane fans beloved football team, the Strikers return home with an important match against Newcastle. The game will certainly prove to be worth the wait as both teams have given some excellent performances this season. If Brisbane can execute its game plan and the supporters get right behind their team, there is evidence to suggest Strikers fans will be singing all the way home.



JUNIOR MASCOTS

Our mascots tonight are the U9's

Caboulture Kelpies

The club originated as a result of the districts need for kids in the community to learn soccer skills and to be apart of a team sport. This need was identified by Glenn and Michelle Kilah, the clubs President and Secretary.

The club was founded in 2001 by Caboulture Baptist Church with one under 7's team. In 2003 the club has one under 7's team, two under 8's and one under 9's team.

The 2003 U/9 team Coach was Paul Rogers, Assistant Coach Mick Hobbs and the Manager was Janine Fox. The under 9 team has 14 players, 5 of which were in the founding under 7's 2001 team; Samuel Fox, Mathew Gibson, Thomas Hobbs, Adam Le Mescam and Daniel Skinner.

The remaining players are Simon Bruhn, Angus Goldman, Jamie Jones, Reece Lacey, Michael Pill, Hayden Potter, Lochlan Rush, Joel Smith and Ben Nasraoui.

It has been a tough year with only one win (however it was over the top team, so there was much celebrating) and 2 draws. There were some very close games and some outstanding play from team members.

In particular our goalie Thomas Hobbs who week after week was told he'd had 'a blinder' and Hayden Potter who was nicknamed 'the wrecking machine' for his commitment to defense. It was rewarding for players to have opposing Coaches and Managers compliment them on their game.

At the start of the season Sam Fox was selected to try out for the North Zone U/10 team and is to be congratulated for his efforts.

The highlight for the team was their one big win and when their coach Paul presented them all with a trophy for their great display of sportsmanship and continual improved effort throughout the year.

The players have worked hard and have formed a great bond with each other and their coach Paul Rogers. They are all looking forward to a great 2004 season. The team is very excited about their opportunity to meet with the Strikers and we would like to thank them for their hospitality.

BSSA COLLECTABLES



The BSSA is pleased to bring you collector cards or the players featured in the Free Kick.

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