

THE SPIRIT OF THE GAME

By Adam Coleman

When historians look back at the old NSL, among the stats will sit a burning question : what happened to Northern Spirit ?

Launched in the 1998-99 season, the Spirit seemed to have provided inner-Sydney football fans with a broad-based club that could quickly rival other clubs for NSL supremacy.

And in their first season, under the coaching of former Socceroo Graham Arnold, they did exceptionally well for a first-year club, finishing 5th in the 15 team league. They would lose the elimination series 2-1 on aggregate to cross-town rivals Marconi Stallions.

That first year also gave us a taste of consistently high crowd support with a staggering five home crowds exceeding 16,000, including a record which still stands - the highest attendance for an NSL regular season (ie not finals) game, when 18,985

MAN OF THE MATCH

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crammed into North Sydney Oval on a warm night in October 1998 to see the new boys lose 2-0 to Sydney Olympic.

There was a touch of promotional glamour about the club, as they made Harry Kewell (his star on the rise at Leeds United) Northern Spirit's Number 1 supporter.

However, the "Spirit" soon left the club as the rumours over NSL re-structure began to bog all clubs down. For those who argue that Brisbane's crowds have dropped in recent years, imagine how it must feel to be a loyal Spirit fan.

Just 5 years ago, they were the hottest ticket in town. Today, they fight for their survival, playing on a council ground with a sprinkling of the first year believers.

Another element that may have led to the Spirit' demise was their partnership with Scottish powerhouse Glasgow Rangers FC. Whilst the partner-

ship did allow an extremely talented English junior called Ben Burgess to join the club (he would score an amazing 16 goals during his 27 game stint for Spirit in his only season in 2000-2001), it alienated some of Sydney's British expatriate community, who had gotten behind the Spirit (given the ethnic alternatives at Marconi, Sydney United and Sydney Olympic) because they WEREN'T affiliated with any club or community.

Tonight's key player for Spirit will be goalsneak Stewart Petrie, who is already entrenched among the NSL goalscoring leaders with seven goals. The Strikers however will also have to deal with Dylan MacAllister, who has scored four goals and who should be back after serving a suspension for accumulating 4 yellows in 9 games.

Last season, the Spirit opened our season of woe with a 2-1 victory over us at Ballymore. Let's hope the Strikers players tonight have long memories!

Strikers Vs Spirit



	P	W	D	L
Overall	13	5	5	3
Home	5	2	2	1
	GF	GA	Pts	
Overall	23	15	20	
Home	11	6	8	

HILTON TAKES HIS CHANCES

By [Name] ew

Young Brisbane Strikers forward Mathew Hilton is optimistic about his team's chances this Saturday night against Sydney side Northern Spirit.

"It's a definite chance to win. I wasn't there for the first match which we won 3-1 but we should be able to do the same this round especially since we're at home," he said.

Originally a junior at Palm Beach and then Gold Coast City, Hilton also did time at the QAS before spending a season at Sydney Olympic where he made 4 appearances before coming to the Strikers this season.

He has also represented Gold Coast from under twelves to sixteens and Queensland at junior level from under twelves to fifteens.

However, what could probably be described as the pinnacle of his career to date was selection in the Australian Joeys squad

for the 2002 Under 17 World Cup. "Playing for the Joeys was a good experience, though the team didn't go to well. We didn't gel as a team and compared to the other teams we weren't too good," he said.

For the 2002 – 2003 season Hilton went to Sydney Olympic where he played under former Strikers player Garry Phillips and, later on in the season, Lee Sterrey.

Matt should find it easy to adapt to life at the Strikers as he feels that the methods used by Stuart McLaren and Luciano Trani are pretty similar. "They have pretty much the same methods but a little better," he said.

Over the past year Matt has continued to improve, particularly in the areas of "experience and holding the ball up as well as keeping possession," he said.

A quietly spoken young man who keeps his cards close to his chest, Hilton impressed in his first starting appearance for the Strikers last Friday in precisely those areas during the 1-1 draw against the Wollongong Wolves.

*According to Stewart McLaren "his use of the ball when going forward is very clever and he sees things that some other players don't seem to see. I was very impressed with his effort."

Hilton said his aim over the next couple of years is to continue to improve and to "make my way into the starting lineup week in week out". In order to achieve this aim Hilton believes he has to "keep playing well and keep holding the ball up well which is a bit different from what I normally do".

Hilton's favourite player in Australia is Ante Milicic, who he played with at Olympic. He also admires the incomparable Brazilian, Ronaldo. However Mathew rates his father as his biggest influence on his football career so far.

"My dad has had the biggest influence. He coached me for one year at Palm Beach in the under 16 side and he's been there for me ever since I was a kid" he said.

Hilton's interests outside of football include movies and the beach which is typical of the laid back stereotype of someone from the Gold Coast.

However, there is nothing laid back about the way he approaches his soccer. Hilton represents the hope for the future of the Strikers and we can hopefully look forward to a few more years yet from this young player.



Matt Hilton

THE QUIET ACHIEVER

By Amanda Atherton



Josh McCloughan

In this era of Australian football Josh McCloughan must be one of the oldest rookies in the NSL. At 28, he has come through from Palm Beach and then 3 seasons with Gold Coast City, before moving to Gold Coast Knights last season. He went there with Adem Poric, who he credits as one of the biggest influences on his football. "He has passed on a lot as a player and a coach" explained McCloughan. "Dennis Dodd (Karl's father) was my first coach when I came up from juniors and has had a lot of influence on the way I play."

Last year he was selected in the Queensland representative side by Peter Tokesi, which may have paved his way to being noticed for the Strikers. With a number of defenders leaving the club last year and a change in coaching staff, McCloughan hit form at the right time to be picked up.

Playing in the NSL has come after a long season on the Gold Coast League. "I have been going since January so my knee has a bit of wear and tear. The brace is helps to manage that" he explained.

The step up to the NSL has been taken strongly by McCloughan. He has played in every game so far in this his first season, perhaps with his

age and experience helping him to handle step. . There is always room for improvement as far as he is concerned. "I could be better in my positional play and distribution. I am always trying to get on the right side of the attacker". McCloughan explained.

The national league is definitely a change from local football. "The quality of players is different. At other levels there are only 3 or 4 strong, good players" McCloughan said.

McCloughan has been pleased with his strong work rate and always gives his all for the team. A strong defender, who generally makes well-timed tackles, he has worked hard over the years to achieve this. "It is something I pride myself on, but as long as the team is doing well I am pleased." he stated. "I like to make sure that opposition attackers know they are in the game".

The backline has certainly gelled well this season, whether it contains Adam Webber or Stuart McLaren.. Some of this is due to the strength of McLoughan and Dodd, however Josh credits the midfield for some of this. "Pete (Grierson) and Louis (Brain) have been fantastic. Their distribution and positioning has been great" explained McCloughan "It makes our job up the back easier to have this sort of quality in the midfield. As a team we are keeping the ball and knocking it around better."

McCloughan is a modest player who works hard for the team, "Right now though I just want to establish myself as a good national league player.....I am trying to build on my form and performance, and on always being there getting the job done. "I am a no one in the League until I prove myself" stated McCloughan

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probably starting to feel more comfortable at this level of football. Perhaps this can lead to a drop in intensity.

A former Mid State League player from Yeppoon, 42km north of Rockhampton, Evans has found it tough to adapt to the faster pace of the NSL Youth League. "It's a different style of play and was hard at the beginning but it has become a lot easier as we progress further into the season," he said.

Despite the difficulties in adapting to the faster pace, Evans has still been happy with his form and improvement. "I haven't missed a game here. I like playing here and I can only improve," he said. "I'm a lot fitter and my touches are getting better".

Life in Australian soccer and indeed life at the Brisbane Strikers is going through a period of change and the same situation exists in the lives of the players in the Strikers youth team. Evans, along with his three flat mates, Tim Hickey, Brendan Donohue and Brad Stevens, have had to adapt from life in Central Queensland to life in a capital city.

"Life is a lot different - there is a lot more to do and I'm starting to enjoy my soccer more since coming down here" he said.

Part of this enjoyment can be put down to the role of Youth team coach Peter Tokesi, who has a very constructive approach to coaching youth players. "He helps us out in a way which makes it a lot easier and he explains what

he expects from us. It's a lot better to work under him than under other coaches," he said.

A former Central Queensland representative since under twelves and Queensland Country representative since under thirteens, Evans has some idea of what the future holds for him. "I want to play youth league over the next few years and if they ever ask me to step up I'm more than happy to though obviously it's a goal to play for the First team regularly," he said.

However he has no plans for going overseas until making it as a first team player for the Strikers.

His favorite players are Karl Dodd in Australia and among the overseas stars he particularly admires the Real Madrid and Portuguese star Luis Figo.

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JUNIOR MASCOTS

Tonights mascots come to us from Ridge Hills united FC.



The U9's are tonight's team and have been playing together since U6/7's. They went through their first two seasons undefeated. As U8's they won the Albany Ck U8 carnival and narrowly lost the final of the Ridge Hill's U8 carnival.

Ridge Hills United FC originally known as Bracken Ridge FC began its affiliation with soccer in 1985.

The club was formed in order to provide an outlet for activity by way of soccer involvement for the local community within the Bracken Ridge area.

At this time the other local club's of Brighton, North Star, Pine Rivers and Albany Creek provided the opportunity for the local junior players to compete in organised soccer competitions.

As the area developed and grew the founding club member's saw a need for the club to expand its boundaries from which players could be drawn.

In 1993 the club changed its name to Ridge Hills United Football Club and since that time growth and development of the club and the local community have continued on an upward trend.

The season 2003 sees the club entering between 25 & 30 junior teams between the ages U6 to U17 in the BN&DJSA competitions, 2 men's senior teams and hopefully 1 ladies team. (Players for these teams are always welcome).

Ridge Hills is located at Stanley Day Park, Grand Street Bald Hills.