

MCLAREN TO MAKE IT HOT FOR POWER?

By Steve Pitman

The Brisbane Strikers return to Perry Park this afternoon on a mission to restore momentum to a campaign that has stuttered with defeats in Sydney on consecutive weekends to the Marconi Stallions and Sydney United.

But disappointing though those defeats were, player-coach Stuart McLaren said this week he had been very happy with the performances of his team. Last week's 1-0 loss to Marconi, in which McLaren's dismissal for a mistimed challenge on Shane Webb obliged his team to play one man short for 70 minutes, particularly pleased him.

"I was very impressed with the courage and the character the players showed, but that was tinged with disappointment about the result and my sending off. We had been keeping possession well, and getting in behind them once or twice. With better luck and execution we might have come away with some points".

An experiment of using Louis Brain inside of David Pilic on the right side of midfield for the first time had shown promise in the first 20 minutes. "It went very well", McLaren said. "We knew Brendan Renaud was a real strength (for Marconi) and we needed someone really busy to put him on the back foot, and David Pilic was doing that. Louis Brain is technically very gifted and

gives us a good attacking option. He times his runs forward very well, as he showed when he scored against South Melbourne. There was some really good linking between him and Warren Moon and Pete Grierson".

But with McLaren out of the contest, he said, the team's formation and game plan had to be adjusted. Midfielder and skipper Peter Grierson played as a sweeper and Karl Dodd moved to the right back position to take McLaren's place, while the Brisbane midfielders and forwards had to sit deeper. Despite the setbacks and adjustments, the Strikers created as many good chances to score as Marconi, but simply failed to take them.

McLaren said that Brain and Pilic will again start in today's game against Parramatta Power - a team the Strikers' coach rates very highly.

"It goes without saying that in terms of individuals they've got the best squad in the league, with players like Fernando Rech, Ante Milicic, Simon Colosimo (who, like McLaren is suspended today), and Ahmed Elrich", McLaren said. "But Wollongong proved last week that nobody is invincible".

This was a reference to the shock win by the lowly Wolves over the previously unbeaten Power which upset a massive betting plunge on tonight's

MAN OF THE MATCH

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visitors - a result which might make the task harder for the Strikers today. "It is always difficult to play against a top side, but even harder after they've had a defeat", McLaren said. "But we're also very keen to come out and make amends after two losses and we're looking forward to being back at home. It should make for a very interesting encounter".

McLaren was uncertain which, if any of the teams, would derive the most benefit from today's early kick-off time, which will expose the players to higher temperatures than would be the case with normal 7.00 pm kick-offs. He said the fact that Sydney's weather had been quite warm this week would help to 'acclimatise' Parramatta, but was hopeful that his own team's regular training sessions at 4.00 pm would help them to cope better. "Either way, if we remain positive, keep the ball and make them chase it could make for a long afternoon for them. Similarly, if they keep the ball it will be a long afternoon for us".

McLaren said his position on the right side of defence would be taken by Adam Webber,

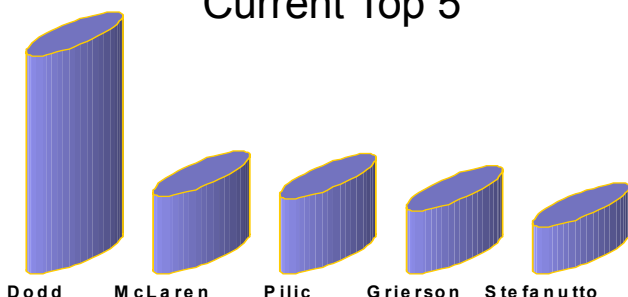
who played regularly in the four-man Brisbane backline towards the end of last season but had been the unfortunate player to make way when the team opted for a backline of three this season. McLaren was confident Webber would produce a strong performance.

He also said Brisbane fans would witness the home debut of goalkeeper Scott Higgins (in his third game deputising for the injured Jason Kearon) - and quite possibly of one or two other squad members. McLaren said he was thinking seriously about selecting a bench with lots of attacking possibilities for this fixture. In that case young striker Matthew Hilton, who has been doing well for the Strikers' youth team and in training, would probably join Josh Rose and Steve Fitzsimmons so as to have "three players to change the game if we need to".

But if Hilton does not get the nod, McLaren said that midfielder Chris Scuderi or defender Daniel Dreger would gain selection.

PLAYER OF THE SEASON

Current Top 5



MORLEY OUT TO MAKE HIS MARK

By Vitor Sorbral

Brisbane Strikers off-season recruit, Luke Morley, is quickly proving to be one of the finds of the season. The 21 year old from Tweed Heads has shown his worth in the early rounds of the season with some superb performances, capped off with three goals so far.

Morley's passion for the game came early on from his father, and at the age of five, he was playing club football. Morley's first club was Kingscliffe Wolves where he stayed until he was fifteen years old. From there Morley went onto Broadbeach colts and then onto Burleigh in the Gold Coast Premier League, all by the age of sixteen. It was also at sixteen that Morley began playing for the QAS, alongside Shane Steffanutto, Jon McKain and Adam Webber. "I was playing for QAS in the summer and Taringa in the winter", he said.

It was at Taringa Rovers that Morley caught the eye of the newly appointed Strikers coach, Stuart McLaren. Brisbane was in need of some firepower up front, and Morley's performances for Taringa gave McLaren the belief that he had found his man. However Morley was only signed on the last day possible, "I signed on the Monday and I started my first game on the Saturday against Northern Spirit", Morley explained.

It was an excellent debut for Morley; he helped the Strikers to a 3-1 win, with two goals in his first NSL appearance. "I feel like I've integrated well into the team, the boys have been great".

Morley hasn't looked back from that opening game. With his skill, speed, and unequalled work rate, Morley has been one of the stars of the season so far. "I'm just relishing the challenge, and the coaches have

been very helpful", he said.

The jump from State League to NSL has been a smooth one, yet Morley sees it as quite a step up in playing standard. "There is a big difference in speed, skill, defence, and tactics... you also learn a lot from watching the match videos".

Morley has certainly learnt a lot in his short time in the NSL; however the youngster is under no illusions about his playing ability. "I still need to really work on my finishing - it's an important aspect, I really have to work on". By working on this, Morley intends to reach double figures in his goal tally, and cement his place in the starting eleven.

What has caught the attention of some Strikers' fans has been Morley's defensive ability. His insistence on getting back to help his team mates has invaluable to the Strikers, and it paid dividends against Newcastle, when he robbed a defender of the ball and set up Royce Brownlie for Brisbane's second goal. "I think everyone has to defend, so when we lose the ball I do everything I can to get it back".

With performances of the calibre seen so far from Luke Morley it is little wonder that Strikers' fans are singing Stuart McLaren's praises in signing him. There is no doubt there is plenty yet to come from the new Brisbane Striker, and with improved finishing there is no reason why he couldn't be amongst the top scorers in the NSL.

But for the moment, Morley is happy just being in the Strikers squad and relishing his opportunity in the NSL.



Luke Morley

PARRAMATTA PAYING FOR POWER SURGE

With the success of Marconi Fairfield and Sydney United throughout the Nineties, it was perhaps no great surprise that traditional rugby league powerhouse Parramatta would eventually re-establish an NSL team (after the lukewarm success of the Eagles in the 80s), with a goal to become the one team to represent the potential of Sydney's expanding Western Suburbs.

The Parramatta Power commenced play in the 1999/2000 season, and in this, their fifth season, might just be the next Sydney-based team to win the NSL title.

Strikers Vs Parramatta



	P	W	D	L
Overall	8	5	1	2
Home	4	4	0	0
	GF	GA	Pts	
Overall	17	10	16	
Home	13	3	12	

Playing in the impressive Parramatta Stadium, and with opening season home crowds between 8-10 thousand, it appeared the blueprint for success for the Power had been penned perfectly.

However, their club has suffered recently in the light of stagnant progression for the national body & the NSL. This season, despite a stellar line-up, crowds of less than 2,000 remain to help "switch on" the Power.

Playing in the familiar colours of blue & gold, the club has played 126 games, for a 56-20-50 record. Having made the finals for the first time last year, the Power are already the frontrunners for the 2003/2004 NSL title, including an amazing 6-0 demolition of Perth Glory four weeks ago.

A shock 3-1 loss against the Wolves last Friday will still be ringing in their ears, so one must ask : Which team will turn up tonight ?

At the helm of the Power is two-time NSL Championship winning coach

SCUDERI SIMMERS TOWARDS NSL BREAKTHROUGH

By Adam Coleman

Nick Theodorakopoulos, who ironically led the Wollongong Wolves to their 2nd title at Parramatta Stadium back in 2001.

This year's squad represents a team playing a season of "make or break" football with club management making some audacious player signings.

Of interest to Brisbane fans will be the return of club favourites Clint Bolton & Fernando Rech. Clint, a former Socceroo and our 1997 Championship winning goalkeeper, was thrown a lifeline by the Power after Sydney Olympic's drastic cost-cutting measures during the off-season.

But it was Fernando's decision to head south that surprised the Strikers' faithful. After two sterling seasons (including winning the NSL Player of the Year in 2001-2002) and with a young family eager to settle down, it will be interesting to see if Brisbane fans treat Fernando as friend or foe.

Other new signings to the Power represent an array of quality NSL players. Simon Colosimo (formerly with Perth, South Melbourne & Carlton), Andre Gumprecht (Perth), Ante Milicic (Sydney Olympic & Sydney United) and Daniel Beltrame (Newcastle United) all bring invaluable finals' experience to a team desperate to win what may be the last National Soccer League Championship, in its present format.

Thankfully, they also have a few players who could be referred to as club stalwarts. Ahmad Elrich's pace and skill could test the Strikers' defense, John Buonavoglia continues to prove that size does not matter with goals scored on a regular occasion, and Alvin Ceccoli continues to be a dark horse, producing the same form he achieved with Wollongong.

Seven weeks ago, the Strikers faced the defending NSL Champions Perth Glory and earned a valuable point in an exciting 0-all draw. How will they fare this afternoon against this season's favourite?

If patience, hunger and bloody-minded tenacity are some qualities required to be a successful footballer, then Brisbane Strikers fans will soon be singing the praises of 20-year-old midfielder Chris Scuderi.

Scuderi's path to the Brisbane Strikers wound its way from his home town of Ayr, via talent identification schemes into the QAS squad based in Townsville, to a short stint in the State League with Bundaberg's Across The Waves and a season in the National Youth League with the QAS in Brisbane.

While playing in the National Youth League, Scuderi impressed former Strikers coach John Kosmina and was invited to train and play pre-season games with the Strikers last year. When Scuderi's efforts were rewarded with a contract, recognition and excitement in the 'big smoke' beckoned early for a raw youngster who admits he had scarcely seen a traffic light until a year before.

Not that he lacked self-belief: "I thought I was ready, because I had worked hard and I had always wanted to be a professional soccer player - that's all I ever wanted to do. But it was a bit surprising, and it seemed like I had been fast-tracked", he said last week.

A few months later, it must have seemed that the fast track had led down to a dry gully. In a squad well stocked with experienced midfielders last season, Scuderi's opportunities were so limited that he is still counting his NSL playing time in minutes - twenty-eight, to be exact.

"It was a privilege to be training with the side, but a bit disheartening (not playing). It was hard to keep my fitness levels up and it was frustrating, but John Kosmina had told me I probably wouldn't be playing much and I knew it was going to be a hard first year".

But no ambitious young player would readily accept a fringe role, and Scuderi was no exception. He set about training the house down, but searched in vain for feedback from Kosmina who, he says, never really explained to him why that wasn't enough to force his way into an



Chris Scuderi

inconsistent team. However, Scuderi says the experience of last season made him mentally stronger and that he learned a lot "by watching players in my position, seeing what they did in training - players like Peter Grierson and Richie Alagich. I tried to emulate that and take some of their

characteristics into my game".

This season, while training with the senior squad and still striving for his NSL breakthrough, Scuderi is getting regular game time with the Strikers' National Youth League team - and finding even this requires some adjustments! "The Youth League is slower and less intense than the NSL. I'd rather be playing NSL, but it's all about playing, getting ninety minutes and getting match fit. Sometimes, though, you go to play it quick and things don't work out (because of the different pace)".

Regular football is again developing his strengths, which he lists as "my passing game, being a 'general' and controlling and taking hold of a game, receiving and playing the ball and then backing up. I like to work hard - I try to bust my arse all the time".

He is also much happier with the feedback he is now getting from Stuart McLaren, Luciano Trani and youth team coach Peter Tokesi on aspects of his game he needs to improve. These, he said, include "my defending, at times - knowing when to rush in, and when to 'sit' - little technical things like that".

Having had ample time to savour the prospect, Scuderi knows exactly how he will respond when his NSL breakthrough finally comes. "I don't think I'm going to be nervous", he said, with an edge of grim determination. "It has been so long, and I want it so bad, that I'll know I can't let my team mates down and I'll just go out and give it one hundred percent. I will be firing on all cylinders".

Heaven help the opposition when Scuderi gets his next chance to uncork his frustrated energies in the NSL.

YOUTH OF TODAY

By Evan Askew

The Brisbane Strikers Youth team needs to stop giving away possession of the ball, especially when not under pressure, according to coach Peter Tokesi.

Losing possession was responsible for the second goal and one of the chief reasons for the two nil loss to Marconi on Saturday.

The second goal came about when possession was given away on the half way line. Despite this, Tokesi says he is happy with the current progress of the side.

"I think the boys are adapting well to the change in pace of NSL youth league soccer and the first touch has improved but we're probably still to casual about giving the ball away when not under pressure," he said.

The lack of time available for pre-season preparation has placed his team at a disadvantage but he believes his team is starting to get over it. "We've come in late and it is only now, ten weeks into the season that I'm finding out what the players can and can't do so it's like our pre season has being through and we've only just started to settle down," he said.

Now that the squad is more comfortable with itself Tokesi is looking to make some modifications to the side.

Up until now they have been using a 4-4-2 system, which he feels, suits the players better. However he suggests that "once we start to play a bit more we'll use a 3-5-1-2 formation."

In addition to this, now that he has access to a full squad of sixteen players, Tokesi has begun a rotation system with the youth players while continuing to use three senior NSL players.

The three NSL players are being used so that those in the senior squad who aren't getting a run or who are just coming back from injury can regain match fitness for when they are actually called upon in a proper NSL first team encounter.

Peter is happy with the progress of his youngsters and believes that some are capable of making their debut in the senior NSL competition by the end of this season.

According to Tokesi the two youngest players, Josh Evans and Tim Hickey, both of Rockhampton have promising futures.

Sebastian Tatchell and Dean Peltohaka have been playing well, and it would seem, have benefited from experience in the local Premier League with Pine Rivers. Russell Woodruffe is another player who has benefited from experience with

Queensland Lions in the local competition.

Luke Fallini from the Gap is also doing well as was Michael Sciardi (another Lions product) until experiencing some misfortune with a broken toe.

Depending on how things go, Tokesi believes these players are capable of getting a run in the Strikers first team before the end of the season and anticipates that in four to five weeks some of the youth team players will begin to train with the first team.

Another player of note is Chris Disipio who has shown an ability to score regularly in the youth NSL. Tokesi believes that while he is scoring he still hasn't adjusted to the level of play, "Chris is still a slightly built player but he can do something that a lot of other players can't and that is score goals," he said.

With four wins from seven encounters this season a finals position is a distinct possibility and progress over the next six rounds could determine just how likely that outcome is.

The first test on that road consists of Parramatta Power who are on an equal number of points so the looming encounter promises to be an exciting affair.



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