

FOOTBALL COMES HOME

By Steve Pitman

Today, after eight long years of worshipping in the temples of false gods, the Brisbane Strikers are bringing our code of football - the *real* football - back to Perry Park.

The Strikers have not played an NSL match at Perry Park since 1995, having left the stadium for the larger capacities and better creature comforts of Lang Park (the home of Rugby League) and then Ballymore (the home of Rugby Union).

But even though the Strikers called other Brisbane stadia home from the mid-90s the lure of Perry Park, their first home ground, never really disappeared. While their

supporters appreciated the comforts of Lang Park and Ballymore, there were certain things about those stadia that left them cold.

As Brisbane Strikers Chairman, Dr Clem Jones, conceded this week there were never enough regular supporters of the club to justify its tenancy of either Lang Park or Ballymore. As a result, spectators were generally herded into one touchline grandstand while the other remained closed. This led many to bemoan the lack of 'atmosphere', as they gazed at the yawning empty spaces in the opposite grandstand. "Why can't we go back to Perry Park?" was an often-heard lament. "With people on all sides of the ground, at least you felt like you were part of a football spectacle".

Other factors like the high price of refreshments, the lack of social club facilities (at Ballymore) and other things over which the Strikers had no control, also rankled. Strikers' supporters often felt their club's

status as a mere tenant left it at the mercy of the QRL or QRU. Supporters' complaints about various aspects of the match day experience were usually brushed aside by the stadium owners, and even such a basic requirement as match scheduling was at the mercy of other sports.

Overall there was a feeling that, comfortable as Lang Park and Ballymore were, they were not *real football* grounds. They just didn't feel like home.

There are many reasons why the Strikers took so long to return to Perry Park - and not all of them have reflected well upon the warring administrators of football in Queensland. Nevertheless, Clem Jones says that returning has been an objective of the club for years, and that "there was no other ground we could use, or would want to use".

While talks about returning to Perry Park took place spasmodically over the years, they did not reach a 'serious' stage until a few months ago. Since then, the club has successfully negotiated a complex deal with the Brisbane City Council and Soccer Queensland to have the lease transferred, and with licensing and gaming authorities to open a licensed social club.

The Brisbane Strikers Board is already actively considering various plans to upgrade the facility at the end of this season. Most likely (and at the very least), a new tier will be built above the old grandstand on the western side of the ground in a

redevelopment that Jones says will cost "millions".

But it was not possible to undertake major construction in the few short months available before the kick-off for this season. So the club instead set about a \$250,000 package of improvements to make the stadium as presentable and comfortable as possible until full redevelopment can occur. In no time at all, the old grandstand has been repainted, its roof repaired and some new seating installed. Inside the stand the

And last, but certainly not least, both pitches have been nursed back to health. The main pitch had become a brown, lumpy, weed-strewn symbol of despair for players and supporters who remembered it in better times. That today it is ready to host the Brisbane Strikers and Sydney Olympic is a minor miracle, and testimony to the loving care poured into it by just about everyone connected with the club - from Board members to players and even supporters.

The remedial work has been hard and the pace frenetic. But the result is that the Brisbane Strikers and football are now back at the venue that has formed the backdrop to the best football memories of generations of Queensland players and supporters - including interstate clashes, State League grand finals, passionate NSL local derbies and exhibition matches between local teams and overseas clubs.



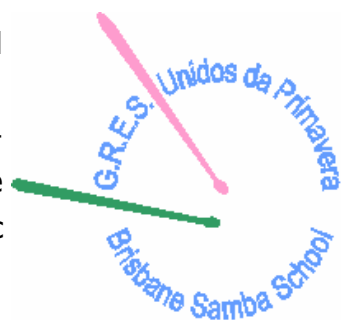
Jones sees Perry Park as a potential unifying influence for the local football community. He says that the

bars, kitchens, media and corporate areas have been comprehensively refurbished, along with office accommodation for the club's administrative and coaching staff. A temporary grandstand (perhaps you are sitting in it now) has been erected on the eastern side of the main pitch, and bitumen footpaths and new roadworks laid.

Brisbane Strikers want the people of that community to once again think of Perry Park as 'the home of soccer'. "We think they can be proud of Perry Park (even) now", he says. "It provides us with an opportunity to have the team and the supporters as part of the family".

We can add nothing to that, except to remind you of the old adage: "The family that plays

Tonight, the Old Lady Perry Park, will Samba through the evening to the fabulous, loud, inspirational and motivational sounds of the Brisbane Samba School drum band, 'G.R.E.S. Unidos da Primavera'. Get into the rhythm of the music and the football.



Free Kick FLIGHT PATH OF THE RED BARON

By Adam Coleman

Stuart McLaren was born in Glasgow, Scotland in August 1975. The McLaren family moved to Brisbane when Stuart was five, and later moved to Rockhampton.

During his junior football years, Stuart played for Capalaba & Mt Gravatt in Brisbane and the Berserker club in Rockhampton, which produced fellow Strikers player Joshua Rose. In 1992, at the age of 16, Stuart was awarded a scholarship at the Australian Institute of Sport, which led to him being signed by the Wollongong Wolves for the 1993/94 NSL Season.

After three seasons (but just twenty-three appearances) Stuart chose to test his mettle overseas, as any twenty-one year old would hope to do. First stop was Scottish club Stirling Albion where Stuart played with typical Scottish pride for two seasons.

Then, he played for the Rangers club in Hong Kong during the northern summer of 1998. Signed to the Strikers in the shadows of their terrible NSL Championship defense, Stuart was placed as a forward, and scored seven goals in just nineteen games, to win the club's Golden Boot for 1998-1999.

The next season, coach John Kosmina took a bold move to convert Stuart from a goal scoring forward into a brickwall central defender (a move made necessary with the arrival of goalscorers Paul Foster and Peter Grierson to the squad), and whilst it meant Stuart would only score another three goals in those

four seasons, he did develop into a player that opposition teams respected. Stuart became the captain of the Brisbane Strikers in that same year (after just nineteen games with the club and 42 in the NSL).

So the striker who became a defender became a leader. Stuart recently handed over the role of captaincy to Peter Grierson when he was named player/coach for the Strikers this season, one of the youngest head coaches in NSL history.

So what can be said of the playing style of McLaren ? After eight seasons and 144 games in the NSL (23 with the Wolves and 121 with Brisbane), Stuart's role in the history and development of the players within the Strikers' teams has been enormous. A vocal player,

Stuart's ability to frustrate and stop opposing forwards had confirmed his captaincy (and now coaching) abilities. With the experience under his belt, Stuart has played a role in helping to shape the careers of other players, leading to the evolution of Shane Stefanutto and Jon McKain during recent years. With any luck, we hope Stuart may end up becoming the first player to play 200 games with the Strikers.

As an Australian with the Scottish sense of humour, a forward who became a defender, or a captain who has now become coach, Stuart has always been a player who will play the full ninety minutes, and everyone knows



Stuart McLaren—Coach and Player and Club Man

that he will give the opposition everything he's got until that final whistle sounds. And if the need eventuates, perhaps he might don the Golden Boot again, and make us sing the Stuart McLaren song:

"My name is Stuart McLaren
I am the Red Baron
I score when I want for Brisbane
BRISBANE !!!

When I walk down the street
All the people I meet
They yell HEY, BIG MAN,

WHAT'S YOUR NAME ?"

Just like he did at his own wedding reception in Scotland this year.

SINGING OUR PRAISES

John Wainwright

The BSSA has a number of initiatives that it has undertaken in the last few years. Now we are trying other, new things as well. We are still producing **THE FREE KICK** (as you can tell) thanks largely to Amanda Atherton and Steve Pitman. Contributions his year will also come from Adam Coleman (the voice of Perry Park over the PA), Vitor Sobral, Wade Hart and myself. Steve also prepares the article for the **BSSA WEB SITE**, which is the best place to go for information about the Strikers. Amanda is the web mistress (her term).

The **JUNIOR MASCOTS** are arranged by Tricia McLeod, and the **MAN OF THE MATCH** is also a BSSA activity.

Votes for Man of the Match also count towards selection of the Player of the Season. Previous winners are Clint Bolton, Fernando Rech, Shane Stefanutto and Matt McKay, all of whom will

be on show for the Parramatta game, as could be this season's winner!

Speaking of Parramatta, this will be the **BSSA AWAY TRIP** this season in February. Not only will we again see all the BSSA players of the season in one match, but we will also see another episode in that fabulous confrontation between Shane Stefanutto and Armed Elrich. Why don't you come along?

And speaking of 'coming along', we held a Meet the Players **FUNCTION** on the Sunday before the start of the season, to send the guys off with our best wishes ringing in their ears. We will be holding some more functions involving the Strikers players this season. Keep an eye out for news about them.

Have you ever eaten a **STRIK-**

INGTON? Place an order at the BSSA Stand and we will bring you six lamingtons from Brumby's, all wearing their Strikers colours.

And the big thing at the BSSA stand will be the **COLLECTABLE ITEMS**. You can collect cards – one for each of the Strikers squad players, and one of Luciano Trani. The same players who are featured in the

Free Kick and on the web site for home games will have their cards available. The cards are made by a very famous Strikers Fan – the only life member of the BSSA – Paul Robinson. I wonder if you can guess who that is...

You can also buy a ticket in the **RAFFLE FOR A MUG** with the featured player's picture and information about him printed on it. If you don't win the mug you

can always place an order for one with the people at the stand, and we will have it there for you at the next home game, or send it to you if you cover the cost of posting and packing it.

These are the activities which the BSSA members are undertaking to bring you information about the Strikers, to enable you to meet the Strikers, to help you to support the Strikers, and to help you to enjoy the Strikers home games.

By the way, did you notice the band today, providing atmosphere and entertainment? We arranged them too, and covered the expenses of The Brisbane Samba School Band

And I thank the members of the BSSA for all their efforts to arrange the activities which help you support the Strikers and enjoy the match day just that little bit more.

www.go.to/bssa

OLYMPIC RINGS THE CHANGES - AGAIN!

By Steve Pitman

Tonight's visitors, Sydney Olympic, have arguably re-invented themselves over the years more often than Madonna. They are at it again this year, changing their name back to Sydney Olympic after existing for two successful seasons as the Olympic Sharks, and moving their home base from Toyota Park in Sydney's Sutherland Shire, to OKI Jubilee Oval at Kogarah.

But underneath it all, they are still very much the club backed and supported by Sydney's Greek community - even if the club's principal backers for the past four or five seasons (headed by multi millionaire Nick Politis), finally pulled the pin a few months ago.

The Politis reign was a bold one, characterised by huge investment (by Australian standards) in quality players in a relentless quest for on-field success, and by an ultimately fruitless attempt to have former English big-spenders (but now impoverished) Leeds United buy into the club.

The Politis era achieved its aim of winning Olympic's first NSL Championship since 1990 as its star-studded line-up, which boasted a handful of former Brisbane Strikers players, won the 2002 grand final against Perth Glory in Perth.

But if Olympic's owners thought that success on the field would translate into financial reward and success off it, they were let down. Even as champions, Olympic could not resist the nationwide downward trend in NSL attendances that accompanied the twin handicaps of Soccer Australia's unprecedented political and budgetary woes, and declining television coverage.

Finally, a few months ago, Politis had enough and walked away, leaving the club back in the hands of its members who had no option other than to release many of the club's highly paid squad. Out went ace

strikers Ante Milicic and Jeromy

Harris, midfielders Andy Packer, Tom Pondeljak and Wayne Srhoj, defender Andrew Durante and goalkeeper Clint Bolton and, in their place, have come a clutch of players from the local leagues around Sydney. The club has also recruited experienced NSL defender Scott Baillie, classy forward Pablo Cardozo and former Brisbane Strikers and Queensland Lions youngster Michael Baird - who is now on loan from South Melbourne.

Baird's presence in the Sydney Olympic side tonight, if selected, will add a touch of spice to the contest. That is because Baird, while looking to move from South Melbourne, spent several weeks immediately prior to the season trialling with the Brisbane Strikers. Just when the Strikers thought they were on the brink of signing him to another stint in Brisbane, Baird made a sudden decision to sign with Olympic instead.

While no-one within the Brisbane Strikers football club is saying anything publicly it is fair to speculate that there will be very few players in yellow and blue wishing him well tonight. But it is not being speculative at all to say that some supporters are looking forward to giving him a very warm reception!

Emotions aside, there is little doubt that Baird's pace and energy combined with Cardozo's trickery and vision could give Stuart McLaren and his fellow defenders a few problems tonight, while the hard-nails defenders Ante Juric and Baillie will be

letting young Brisbane forwards Luke Morley and Joshua Rose know they are around.

Sydney Olympic might not be quite the force this season in the last two, but we can expect anything but a smooth ride for the home side tonight.

Strikers Vs Olympic



	P	W	D	L
Overall	17	7	1	9
Home	8	7	1	0
	GF	GA	Pts	
Overall	23	26	22	
Home	18	6	22	

TRANI CHIMES IN FOR THE STRIKERS

By Vitor Sobral and Wade Hart

Luciano Trani, the Brisbane Strikers new assistant coach, expects the team to achieve a top six position this season. Trani believes the formula to qualify for the top six is a mixture of fitness, team spirit, and a well organised team. "In this competition, if you're fit, if you have a good team spirit, and if you're well organised, you will make the top six".

Strikers' fans should expect the team to play an open, attacking style of football, in which there will be plenty of chances for the wide players to get forward. However Trani also emphasizes the need for balance and well tuned defense. "We want to

see an open game, and we want players to try things, but we want them to be smart in when and where they do it... one of the things we also need to have is a solid back line".

The goal for the Strikers as a team is to achieve 30 to 35 points which should see them attain a top six position. Individually the players have all been assigned certain targets, and as a group the coaching staff is pushing for a good team spirit in which every player feels free to express himself. "We will be looking for players to express themselves and let them feel relaxed".

Trani has been the assistant to a player/coach before and recognises the importance of the role the assistant has to play in this situation. "The coach needs to get a picture of what's happening on the field...I will make an assessment of what is going right or wrong on the field, I will put this forward to Stuart along with a solution and Stuart will have the final decision on what is to be done".

This mix has the potential to pay excellent dividends for the Strikers, as the mixture of McLaren's good man management and Trani's coaching astuteness is a good blend for the club.

Trani made many sacrifices in coming to Brisbane, but it is a job he is fully committed to and excited about. "My heart was always with Brisbane...I wanted to go into an environment different from Victoria and as the Strikers are an NSL club it was an excellent opportunity".

Last season Trani was at the Melbourne Knights as assistant to player/coach Andrew Marth. In 2000 Trani had won the National Youth competition with the Knights' youth side. He was promoted to assistant in the following years. However, after a new board was voted in at the Knights, he seemed to be out of favour, and was perhaps unfairly sacked. Trani then took over at Victorian Premier League club Fawkner Blues, where he took to the team from second last to almost making the finals.

Trani's appointment as the Strikers' assistant coach will add an extra dimension to Brisbane's coaching staff, and there is no doubt he will prove an invaluable source of knowledge to Stuart McLaren and the players. His meticulous planning and study of the opposition is something which will take a lot of weight from McLaren's shoulders.

Brisbane has gained one of Australia's most committed and talented young coaches, and football in Queensland can only benefit from his appointment.



Featured player Mugs available to order from \$25
Featured player collector card \$0.50

Strikingtons also available to order \$5 / 6

All at the BSSA Stand

BSSA COLLECTABLES

UPBEAT McLAREN RAISES THE STRIKERS TEMPO

By Steve Pitman

Immediately after his appointment last month, new Brisbane Strikers player-coach Stuart McLaren set about building a team that could go forward with more pace and purpose, but with a tighter defensive unit behind it than the one that leaked too many soft goals in recent seasons.

"We wanted to try to harness the youthful exuberance of players like Matthew McKay and Shane Stefanutto, who were already on our books, and add new players like Steve Fitzsimmons and Royce Brownlie who are very mobile players who can help us play the kind of game we want to play", McLaren said this week. "If we can play at a higher tempo, then teams coming up here - particularly in the warmer months like January and February - may find it difficult to live with us.

"To sustain a high tempo game for ninety minutes is well-nigh impossible - we're fit but we're not superhuman - but the time when you're going to hurt teams is when you can increase the tempo quickly".

In pursuit of this aim McLaren recruited a number of new, young players to the team - and some of them impressed him in last week's convincing 3-1 win in Sydney over Northern Spirit in the season opener.

McLaren said one of the most pleasing aspects last week had been "the performance of the debutants. I was confident that (defenders) Karl Dodd and Josh McLaughlan would perform well at NSL level, but you're not really sure until they're in that environment and can prove it. Also, Luke Morley looked very much at home".

Morley bagged two goals in a win that, for McLaren, had only one jarring note - the failure to keep a clean sheet. But overall, the rookie coach said he was happy with the team's performance and saw no need to change anything for tonight's match against Sydney Olympic.

"It worked well last week, and we could even see an improvement this week. Because the surface (in Sydney) was very lumpy we couldn't get the ball down and play an intricate passing game. Perry Park will be better. The boys have earned another chance. If it ain't broke, don't fix it".

McLaren said it had been difficult to get a reliable guide on how the new-look Sydney Olympic side might play tonight. "They'll probably rely heavily on Pablo Cardozo and Michael Baird. They haven't got as much firepower as in recent seasons, having lost

guys like Ante Milicic, Tom Pondeljak, Andy Packer and Jeromy Harris, but they'll be solid at the back with Juric, Souris and Baillie. They are very physical competitors, but Luke Morley and Josh Rose have never shirked a challenge and if we can get them facing forward and running at their defenders, that's where we can give them problems.

"The strength for us could be across the middle of the park because they've not got too many experienced NSL players there. With Pete Grierson in the middle, and Shane Stefanutto and Matt McKay forming a good understanding on the left, and guys like Pilic and Fitzy (Fitzsimmons) and even Louis Brain elsewhere, if we can get on top in that area it should make it easier for us".

McLaren is also hoping the sense of occasion brought about by playing at the club's new home ground tonight will help bring out the best in his players.

"I hope it does", he said. "It provides an extra little bit of adrenalin and motivation. There is a sense of purpose in the players to prove to people what we are capable of. But it's important not to get too carried away with it and to stay focused".



JUNIOR MASCOTS



The first mascots to appear at Perry Park for the Strikers in eight years are the under nines from

North Pine

The North Pine Baptist Soccer Club is based on the North Side of Brisbane at "John Oxley Park" at Murrumba Downs. They are a non-profit organization and are affiliated with the North Pine Baptist Church.

The Club has been running now for ten years. It has grown rapidly over the last few years to develop into what is now a very strong club. North Pine has 33 teams - 28

teams from U7 to U15, 2 senior mens teams and 3 over 30's teams. This season has been a very successful year with 11 teams making it into their semi-finals and 4 teams winning Grand Finals.

However winning isn't everything and North Pine focus on making sure the children are having fun and to encourage an environment in which good sportsmanship and fair play are paramount.

North Pine Baptist Soccer Club consider themselves a family orientated club which provides a visible contact point between our Church and the Community.

For further information about the Club please contact

Greg Olive on 0401 962982.

Do you want a team to be junior mascots for one game? We still have dates available, but get in quick or you might miss out.

Contact Tricia McLeod on 3261 2928 to organise a home game appearance

PLAYER OF THE SEASON



Voting has changed this year. If you are a BSSA member you can register to vote for this prestigious award every home game.

Contact Alex Wainwright either by phone on 3279 2807 or by email at BSSAvotes@tpg.com.au

Then after each home game register your top three players for 3,2 and 1 points. These points will be tallied to produce the BSSA Player of the Season.

If you are not a BSSA member don't despair. It only costs \$10 to join and have your say in the best player each game. So join up now!