

Gatto's stellar strike

IT TOOK something out of the box for Stratford to beat Edge Hill 1-0 in their FNQ Football premier division soccer clash at Tiger Park last night.

That special moment, a superb strike by Stratford's Daniel Gatto in the 68th minute, was highlighted by rival coaches Glenn Binskin (Dolphins) and Rob Wales (Tigers) as the type of moment which decides battles as intense as the one last night.

But that's where the comparison stops with the two mentors' views on the degree of luck involved with the strike poles apart.

Binskin was delighted with the goal, in which sharp interplay between Aaron Bull and Gatto created an opening for Gatto to loft a shot from outside the 18-yard box and over Edge Hill custodian Sam Ferguson, who was off his line.

"I said to Daniel Gatto at halftime, 'Any opportunity you get, have it, mate,'" he said.

"I said, 'Back yourself, believe in yourself', and that strike out there was just unbelievable."

Wales also praised the quality of the strike but believed it was an unlucky way for his side to go down.

"Good goal, but if he scores another one like that again, I'll be amazed," he said.

Both sides were scrappy

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in the first half but lifted their performances to another level in the second in response to the urging of both coaches.

After weathering plenty of Edge Hill attack in the opening minutes of the second half, Stratford showed their own intent with Ferguson defusing a dangerous Shane Raso cross in the 54th minute and producing an excellent save to deny new Stratford signing Taka Ki Klichy nine minutes later.

The Dolphins did not have to wait much longer for Gatto's breakthrough, but then had to survive their own nervous moments.

The Tigers' Vladimir Andreski drilled a left foot shot in the 73rd minute only to be denied by a great reflex save by Stratford keeper Phil Sorensen.

Defenders Alex Kendall and Neil Mapp, midfielder Andre Lohmann and forward Connell Breton impressed for Stratford, as did Ki Klichy in his first game for the club since arriving from Japan.

In other games, Leichhardt stayed on top of the ladder with a 3-1 away win over Mareeba on Saturday night and defending premiers Marlin Coast had a 5-2 victory over Innisfail.



RESULTS

FNQ Football

Other Round 1, Match 6 results:

Reserve: Leichhardt 3 d Mareeba 0, Marlin Coast 6 d Innisfail 2, Edge Hill 6 d Stratford 0.

Youth: Innisfail 5 d Marlin Coast 3, COE U15 2 d Edge Hill 0.

Ladies: Edge Hill 4 d Stratford 2, Leichhardt 3 d Mareeba 1, Innisfail 5 d Marlin Coast 1.

2nd div: Edge Hill 4 d Stratford 1, Hmong Cairns 3 d Innisfail 1, Atherton 2 d Douglas 0, Redlynch 2 drew with Marlin Coast 2, Souths 8 d Leichhardt 2.

Premier division table:

Team	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Leichhardt	6	6	0	0	17	7	15
Stratford	5	4	0	1	12	8	12
Edge Hill	5	3	0	2	12	8	9
Marlin Coast	5	3	0	2	9	6	9
FNQ Fusion	3	1	0	2	8	9	3
Mareeba	5	0	0	5	8	17	0
Innisfail	4	0	0	4	6	17	0

For other division points tables, visit <http://fnqfootball.sportzvault.com>.

Tight battle: Stratford debutant Taka Ki Klichy vies for possession with Edge Hill's Shay Douglas in their premier division encounter yesterday.

Picture: JAKE NOWAKOWSKI

Hurt Harry reflects on heartbreak

SOCCEEROO sensation Harry Kewell has never been known to run away from a battle.

But as Australia faced Italy during the 2006 World Cup, the 31-year-old attacker contemplated fleeing the stadium, torn by his inability to join his teammates on the pitch.

A toe infection left the man who secured Australia's historic first passage into the second round watching from the bench.

"I just felt like walking out of the stadium, I would've got on a bus and taken the bus home if I could've, I just wanted to go home," said Kewell on the anguish he felt when he saw his team get defeated by a controversial last-minute penalty.

"But you've got to put your personal feelings aside and be there for your team."

On the eve of the 2010 World Cup, Kewell again has the nation on tenterhooks.

A groin injury has meant he's only had a handful of minutes on the pitch since January, but predictions of Kewell missing the World Cup are wildly off the mark.

Kewell, who is in Melbourne to join his Socceroos teammates ahead of next Monday's friendly against New Zealand, said the decision to leave Galatasaray early was an insurance policy.

He is eager to line up against the Kiwis, although coach Pim Verbeek has said he will err on the side of caution and leave Kewell out.

Ballack may miss opener

AUSTRALIA'S World Cup hopes have been boosted with Germany skipper Michael Ballack admitting he is an injury doubt for next month's tournament.

Ballack hurt an ankle during Chelsea's FA Cup final victory at the weekend, later admitting the injury could threaten his spot in the World Cup where Australia meet Germany in the Group D opener on June 13.

The 33-year-old, who was talismanic for the Germans in the past two World Cups, limped off at Wembley after 44 minutes of Chelsea's 1-0 win over Portsmouth with an injury to his right ankle.

The German midfielder said he was worried after the match.

"Until I know what the MRI scan will reveal, I am naturally concerned," said Ballack, who is due to have the scans today and left Wembley with his right ankle in a special protective cast, although preliminary X-rays showed no broken bones.

A Chelsea spokesman said the medical staff do not think the injury will keep Ballack out of the World Cup as he prepares to fly to Sicily to link up with the rest of the Germany squad for their training camp.

Cross double keeps flying Leichhardt on top

LEICHHARDT staged a second-half comeback to retain top spot on the FNQ Football ladies' division soccer ladder with a 4-2 away win over Mareeba on Saturday.

Trailing 1-0 at the break, Leichhardt gradually broke down Mareeba's determined defence to post four second-half goals in a match featuring enterprising attack from both sides.

Hannah Cross scored twice for the Lions with Kelly Wilson and Chantelle Maugeri adding the others.

Mareeba's goals were posted by Melissa Panetta and Samantha Cater.

Leichhardt coach Ken Bosence said his players had lifted their effort after halftime following a poor first stanza.

"We scored three goals within 10 minutes and that took the wind out of Mareeba," he said.

Bosence said Leichhardt's

first-half effort had been reminiscent of the side's recent loss to Stratford.

"I was disappointed with that Stratford game, but we've done well the last few games and hopefully, now we'll just keep moving forward and learning from our mistakes."

Mareeba assistant coach Tony Panetta said his side had matched Leichhardt for much of the match.

"The girls did quite well," he said. "They're still a young side in progress."

"We had a few chances to bury the game after being 1-0 up but didn't take them and then Leichhardt began to run through us."

Panetta said Stephanie Vedelago had an outstanding game for the Bulls, and both he and Bosence praised the efforts of rival goalkeepers Leanne Sarota (Leichhardt) and Carla Panetta (Mareeba).



Air time: Leichhardt's Chantelle Maugeri gets off the ground for a stunning strike on Saturday.

Picture: JIM HATCHMAN