

# Hot Rangers reinforce status as powerhouse

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MARLIN Coast Rangers sent an ominous warning to the rest of the FNQ Football premier division soccer competition with a 4-2 home win over Edge Hill at Trinity Beach on Saturday night.

In a fast and physical clash, the Rangers led 3-2 at halftime and scored the only goal of the second half to secure their fourth successive victory and, in the process, serve notice that they will not easily relinquish their title.

The home side were quick to stamp their mark on the match with a slick interchange between David Soncin and Gabby Mason resulting in a smart goal to Soncin in just the third minute.

Edge Hill hit back in the 14th minute when Colin Habgood nailed a shot from an acute angle after good lead-up work by Myer Sheriff and Rodrigo Bouabida.

Celebrating Tigers' fans had barely quietened down when the Rangers hit back, as Mason delivered for Joe Battle to scoop his shot over advancing Tigers keeper Sam Ferguson's head from close range and into the net.

With both teams attacking at every opportunity, it came as no surprise when the Tigers again drew level when Sheriff scored following a Scott White raid.

The stalemate was again quickly broken after a Stuart Dunn long ball found Battle, who crossed for Kaylan Tyson to finish off in the 39th minute.

In a second half just as entertaining as the first, the scoring was limited to just the one goal when Mason effectively killed off the Tigers' challenge after charging in for a header at the near post off a corner in the 72nd minute.

Elsewhere, Stratford strengthened its hold on second spot with a 2-0 home win over FNQ Fusion on Saturday night.

An own goal and a clever set-piece strike from Takuya Kikuchi in just his second game for the Dolphins were enough to secure the points against Fusion.

Stratford coach Glenn Binskin said his team had needed to work hard to overcome the talented youngsters.

Innisfail recorded its first win of the season yesterday with a 5-1 triumph over the visiting Mareeba outfit.

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Aerial battle: Fusion's Scott White (left) wins a header against his Rangers opponent on Saturday night.

Picture: MIKE WATT

## Garcia, Rhys get guarantee

TWO more tickets on Pim Verbeek's plane to South Africa have been secured and the Socceroos coach will blend first-choice stars with fringe dwellers against New Zealand tonight to complete his World Cup check-in.

Verbeek will cut his provisional squad from 31 to 27 tomorrow after the New Zealand friendly at the MCG with the chosen players heading to the pre-World Cup training camp in South Africa.

The Dutchman must send another four home by June 1 to come up with his official 23-man World Cup squad.

Verbeek ended some of the speculation yesterday, surprisingly guaranteeing Hull City midfielder Richard Garcia and Middlesbrough defender Rhys Williams passage, despite their squad-player status.

Both have been on restricted duties at the training camp in Melbourne because of niggling injuries but they will be among the 27 going to South Africa on Wednesday.

"They will be in the 27 because I have to make a final decision on June 1," Verbeek said.

"I think they could play tomorrow but that is too early, so we will build them up for the next three days and from the first day in South Africa, they are 100 per cent available for the training sessions."

It means 18 places in the provisional 27-man squad are effectively locked in. Harry Kewell and Mark Schwarzer won't play against New Zealand because of injury, while Scott Chipperfield will be rested.

But all of them will be going to South Africa.

## Kiwi coach to keep the faith

ALL Whites coach Ricki Herbert has predictably persevered with the players that secured New Zealand's passage to soccer's World Cup for tonight's friendly with Australia at the MCG.

Herbert selected the starting lineup that battled to a draw with Bahrain last October, so there is just one change from the 11 that took the field for the 1-0 return leg victory in Wellington on November 14.

Experienced midfielder Simon Elliot, who was unavailable through injury in Wellington, replaces Michael McGlinchy, who will be among the reserves.

Uncapped defender Winston Reid is poised to make his international debut alongside the squad's other newcomer, Canterbury midfielder Aaron Clapham.

Herbert is able to make six substitutions through the course of the match, so Scottish-raised defender Tommy Smith, who debuted in the March friendly against Mexico, is also in line for game time.

## Leichhardt lift form to greater heights

LEICHHARDT and the FNQ Centre of Excellence Under-15s are bringing out the best in each other in the FNQ Football youth division soccer premiership.

Following a 2-all draw in their previous encounter, Leichhardt took the honours 4-2 at the Stratford ground on Saturday.

But the teams were locked at 2-all for much of the match and could have gone either way.

Rival coaches Chris Holmes (Leichhardt) and Peter Mortimer (FNQ) both shared a belief that the two teams inspired each other to lift to another level.

"They (FNQ) are a top-quality

side and we love playing against them, they are a real good challenge," Holmes said.

"Both teams had to fight hard for possession, they (FNQ) play confronting football."

He was impressed with his team's ability to firstly hold out their opponents and then score two late goals when reduced to 10 players for the final 30 minutes of the match after Trent Jorgensen was sent from the field.

Centre of Excellence coach Mortimer said his team had pushed too hard to seal the game after Leichhardt were reduced to 10 players.

"We tried to rush when our type of game is more of a possession game," he said.

"But Leichhardt played well and dug deep because they were shattered (physically).

"It's OK that they got on top of us because they've now set the benchmark for us to work towards and we will now set our sights on that."

Ryan Hogan scored twice for Leichhardt with Martin Scott and Tom Murphy adding the others to ensure the Lions stayed on top of the ladder with Shaun Bennie and Nick Terry scoring for the second-placed FNQ outfit.



Tight tussle: FNQ Centre of Excellence's Joshua West (left) tries to keep possession against his Leichhardt opponent on Saturday.