

Fun and thrills on the

Hat-trick by Williams in Leichhardt title victory

RESERVES

AN inspired performance from man-of-the-match Dean Williams helped Leichhardt upset Marlin Coast Rangers in the Reserve grand final on a wet Saturday afternoon.

The strong-running Williams scored a hat-trick in his team's 4-1 win and caused the Rangers' defence constant grief.

The Lions overcame a dominating start from the Rangers when Williams grabbed his first and they finished the better side heading into the break.

An error from Marlins keeper Kevin Ward handed Williams another early in the second half and it spurred them into action as they dreamed of their first title since 2000.

Ward quickly made up for his attempt by pulling off at least six quality stops later in the half, with the Lions forwards running rampant.

The short, sharp soccer that kept the Rangers in the contest early on evaded them as Leichhardt continued to pepper their goal.

The Rangers were guilty of more loose marking soon after and Glen Hillman helped himself to grand final goal of his own.

William Hayes earned a red card when he hand-balled on the line to stop the Lions' fourth, after their defence failed to clear the loose ball.

Williams stepped up and slotted the ensuing penalty kick, achieving his hat-trick in the 64th minute.

Rangers skipper Kris Kingston lamented a dominant opening where they didn't make them pay.

"We were looking good in the first 20 minutes, but lost our way towards the end," he said.

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PREMIER LEAGUE

THE writing was on the wall just minutes into Saturday night's Premier FNQ Football grand final at Barlow Park.

Marlin Coast – chasing their fourth successive trophy – emerged from the tunnel a team determined and Stratford had no answer to the onslaught that followed.

The final score was 7-0, but it could have been far more embarrassing for the boys in blue if Rangers were more clinical in the second half.

Time and again the Marlin Coast midfield opened up Stratford's defence with ease, able to make metres through the centre before finding strikers with loads of space to work a shot.

While Rangers knocked the ball around the park with grace, Stratford struggled to hold any sort of possession and took poor options to break down the few opportunities they had.

Each goal was celebrated with gusto and gradually the boisterous Stratford supporters were hushed.

Winning skipper and goal-scorer Gabby Mason took the chance to have one last swipe at his opposition after the final whistle.

"We battled hard all year but in the end we showed our superiority," he said.

Striker Christopher O'Hare was instrumental up front, netting a hat-trick and received player of the final honours, but the midfield of Justin Van Matre, Ryan McLellan and Steven Dunn were just as good.

"Those three were fantastic," coach Fab Soncin said.

Ryan McGowan did not miss out on the fun either, scoring three of his own.

The result added to the team's dominance of finals football, after 5-2, 8-0 and 4-0 wins in the past three years.

"You don't plan to go scoring that many goals. You just try and create chances and if it happens, it happens," Soncin said.

"You don't just want to win on penalties or a fluke goal. You want to win in style and we did that."

Stratford coach Glenn Binskin said his team could not match the urgency shown by the champions.

"They pushed players through the midfield and hit us on the counter attack and we couldn't handle it," he said.

Celebration time: From left, Marlin Coast players Gabby Mason, Christopher O'Hare and Justin Van Matre celebrate on their way to a 7-0 Men's Premier FNQ Football grand final win over Stratford at Barlow Park on Saturday night. Pictures: SEAN DAVEY



"Fab's a good coach, he pushed men up and at the end of the day it came down to hunger and they had the greater hunger."

The Rangers fourth goal – scored by McGowan – came one minute before halftime and sparked wild on-field celebrations, punctuated by midfield maestro Van Matre directing his pleasure towards the blue Stratford army in the grandstand.

It was more of the same in the second half, with Marlin Coast exposing the tired Stratford defence with every burst forward.

Stratford captain Mitch Bull was proud of his team despite the anticlimax to a breakthrough grand final appearance.

"To get here was a great effort. But

Marlins are a good team and they've shown it tonight. 7-0 is a bit of a flogging."

Binskin did not confirm if he would be back in the chair next year.

"We'll see, I'm not going to make any decisions yet. But all of those guys in there mate, I'm proud of. At the start of the year they said we wouldn't be there but we made it," he said.

The final stages of the match were marred by an all-in scuffle which led to Stratford's Takuya Kikuchi and Marlin Coast's Samuel Gelvin getting red cards.

But it only delayed the inevitable as the Rangers celebrated their fourth straight grand final win with a loud rendition of the team song in the Barlow Park changerooms.



Heads up: Stratford's Neil Mapp manages to get above the Marlin Coast defence.

Logan's run gives her side winning edge



Aerial battle: Edge Hill captain Joanna Ward (right) fends off Leichhardt's Rachel McCormick.

EDGE Hill Ladies hero Jess Logan will be dreaming for years of the goal that won her team the final.

In an enthralling decider the Edge Hill underdogs looked to have stolen victory in extra time against Leichhardt, after scores were locked 1-1 at full time.

A breakaway goal to Shaquille Chong gave Edge Hill the lead during the second period of extra time, only to see Leichhardt run down the other end and equalise.

Fans and players were readying themselves for a penalty shootout, but Logan took the ball from a well-directed cross and calmly chipped the keeper to give her side the lead, again.

LADIES

The whistle sounded soon after and the large group of Edge Hill fans rejoiced, while the Lions slumped to the turf.

The two sides belied the wet conditions to play sharp, clean and calculated soccer for the first 90 minutes.

Both sides had several opportunities to break the 1-1 deadlock in normal time, but keepers Farrah Boustead (Edge Hill) and Leanne Sarota (Lions) bravely came off their line to make some decisive saves.

Player of the final and Edge Hill captain Jo Ward was determined in the midfield and helped shut down

the brilliant Chantelle Maugeri.

Countless times Maugeri looked to push forward, but a hard-working Ward managed to restrict her impact on the game.

The winning captain was rapt after the match.

"Not only today, but all season it's been a delight to play with you guys and I couldn't be prouder," she said.

"I've got to thank Leichhardt because there isn't a nicer bunch of girls to play against."

The loss continues the Lions' horror finals run, having won eight minor premierships in the last 10 years, but only winning two grand finals in that time.