

Edge Hill's stunning e

Edge Hill ended Marlin Coast's premiership dominance with a gutsy victory, writes BRAD THOMPSON

THEY required extra-time to surmount an early two-goal deficit, but Edge Hill United finally shattered the Marlin Coast Rangers modern day monopoly of FNQ Premier League grand finals on Saturday night.

In doing so, Edge Hill completed the minor premiership-grand final double in a cliff-hanging decider at Barlow Park.

Edge Hill player-coach Rob Wales summed up the courage of his players by offering an apt description of the outcome of the gallant fight-back.

His side inched their way into the clash after the Rangers put one hand on a fifth straight grand final triumph by earning a 2-0 break after just five minutes to shock the pro-Edge Hill crowd.

"We just got stunned in the first five minutes but to come back like that was sensational," he said. "The boys showed a lot of character."

Despite being denied a history-making fifth straight title, it was by no means a changing of the guard for a Rangers side littered with young talent, a pragmatic Rangers coach Paul Fitzgerald implored after defeat.

"It could have gone either way, maybe their (Edge Hill's) experience told in the end," he said.

"We're a very young side and I'm very proud - it was a fantastic performance. Edge Hill deserved their day in the sun."

Fitzgerald was forced to roll the dice admitting "it was a gamble" to play his most influential player - a far from fully-fit, yet brave key midfielder Ryan McClelland.

The Rangers also must now come to grips with the retirement of club stalwart George Koroma.

But it appeared unlikely that the Rangers' winning streak in finals would be snapped as they refused

to take a lasting effect from a combined discrepancy of 11 goals in their past two losses to Edge Hill - all in the past month.

Young mid-season recruit Jack Gosbell scored after just three minutes, then Ryan McGowan followed less than 90 seconds later.

Edge Hill loomed to score on numerous occasions, but a number of below par touches when in range proved costly as they tried to bite into the margin.

It took a bending bullet from livewire Takuya Iwata to give the Edge Hill faithful something to cheer about just before half-time.

Their growing momentum was confirmed when skipper Nick Notaras' strike levelled the score at 2-all just seconds before the bell.

It was the Rangers who looked most likely to break the deadlock, but they failed to convert, and when the clash was forced into extra-time, it was Edge Hill who took their chance.

Late substitute Kim Ja Un, who Wales' anointed as his X-factor post game, scored the match-winner early into extra-time and the Rangers failed to muster another equaliser.

Michael Evans, a vital cog in the midfield trio with Notaras and Marc Baker, was named player of the final.

"He's (Evans) been sensational for us all year and he really does control our midfield," Wales said.

Edge Hill keeper Sam Ferguson, along with skipper Notaras and Vlad Andreski, was part of the side's last grand final win in 2005.

"It was very similar (to 2005) and equally as challenging," he said.

Edge Hill celebrated after their win, but their attention quickly turns to representing the league in the Crad Evans Shield on October 8 against Townsville's best representative.



Grand final action: Marlin Coast captain Gabby Mason is first to the ball despite close contact from an Edge Hill opponent. Inset: Edge Hill's Nick Notaras (top) celebrates a goal and Edge Hill's Greg Van der Pluym heads the ball forward.

Pictures: BRENDAN FRANCIS

"WE JUST GOT STUNNED IN THE FIRST FIVE MINUTES BUT TO COME BACK LIKE THAT WAS SENSATIONAL" - EDGE HILL'S ROB WALES

Sarota's safe hands crucial

LADIES

METICULOUS planning from coach Kenneth Bosence was backed up by vital goal-keeping work from Leanne Sarota as Leichhardt survived a penalty shootout against Edge Hill United in another epic FNQ Ladies Division grand final on Saturday.

Edge Hill seemingly had the upper hand in their bid for a third straight grand final victory under the guidance of coach Dean Ashton, leading 1-0 late in the game after Siobhan Macken's 70th minute goal.

But a late strike by Leichhardt's Sarah Eigl forced extra-time which failed to separate the two sides again, sending the decider into a gripping penalty shootout.

Flawless kicking from the spot was culminated by midfielder livewire Ch-

antelle Maugeri slotting her chance, along with the safe hands of Sarota guarding the goals to clinch the win for Leichhardt.

The penalties scenario raised the heart-rate only slightly of Bosence, who earlier in the week had planned for the possibility.

"It's funny, on Thursday (at training) we actually trained for penalties," he said.

"In my head I knew who was taking them."

Sarota, Leichhardt's powerhouse keeper - and also the older sister of Gordonvale's own Socceroo Adam -

was unflappable under the pressure of the penalty shootout and was deservedly given player-of-the-match honours.

"I don't mind penalties, a lot of keepers don't like them, but I think it's a good challenge," Sarota said.

"There's more pressure on the opposition player shooting."

Edge Hill captain Helen Cross was inspirational in leading her team despite playing with her toe fractured in two places.

"It was a gutsy effort, I take my hat off to her ... from when she first put her boot on, she was in pain," Bosence said.

Leichhardt will now prepare to play Burdekin in the Crad Evans Shield on October 8.



In control: Edge Hill's Lina Kewas attempts to elude Leichhardt's Kelly Wilson.