

The new name in NZ football



Paul Halton

Supporting the Auckland Kingz was never easy. The team had two basic flaws – they could neither attack nor defend. They kept losing and in the end their excuses ran pretty thin.

I'm no Arsene Wenger but I do know that letting the opposition striker stand unmarked in your penalty area is a mistake.

Their replacement in the Australian A-league, the

Knights, have a better chance of success.

Friends of mine used to watch the Kingz with the enthusiasm only die-hard fans can muster.

"They played better this game. You watch next time out – they'll win," was a typical comment.

Next time would come around, the Kingz would lose again, loyal fans would be crushed and eventually they stopped watching.

However, the biggest sin the Kingz committed was not on the pitch.

Paul Gascoigne, legendary England midfielder, ex-Lazio and Everton, was rumoured to have signed for them. Players often do this to spark a bit of interest in them, so sometimes it's not true.

But if Gascoigne said he wanted to sign for the Kingz they should have bitten his arm off.

Regardless of his off-field antics and lack of match fitness, he was an awesome talent. He was able to dribble the ball

through a crowded penalty area, create chances and score goals.

Gascoigne could have done for the Kingz what Zola did for Chelsea and added some much-needed inspiration.

Such a player is valuable for his skill but also his talismanic presence on the pitch. I was excited about seeing him play in Auckland.

Unfortunately, the Kingz said there had been no contact and they didn't want him.

I went back to following English football and my beloved club Arsenal.

So it was a surprise to see a couple of names I recognised when I looked at the Knights website: Neil Emblen and Sean Devine.

A former Wolverhampton player, Neil Emblen can play in defence or midfield.

He has Premiership experience which could prove invaluable to the new team.

Devine is a prolific striker who has played for Wycombe Wanderers and Exeter City in recent seasons.

I saw him play for Wycombe

in 1999 against Reading.

It was a cold, clear day at St Adams Park and it seemed the whole of High Wycombe had turned out to watch.

In an exciting game Wycombe won 5-3 and Devine scored a second half hat-trick.

Last season Devine transferred from Wycombe to Exeter City, playing in a team that held Manchester United to a goalless draw in the FA Cup.

A truly epic result, it proves anything can happen in football. Manchester went on to win the replay 2-0, with goals from Ronaldo and Rooney.

As proven players, Emblen and Devine will strengthen the Knights squad.

The Knights pre-season has consisted of a 3-1 loss to Sydney United, a 5-0 loss to the Queensland Roar and a 1-0 loss to the Central Coast Mariners.

Three straight losses is not the best start but isn't indicative of how the season will turn out. The squad of 22 players has only recently been assembled and they need time to form into a cohesive team.

The 5-0 loss doesn't worry me either. Glasgow Celtic lost by the same margin to unknown Slovakian team FC Artmedia Bratislava in the Champions League this year.

All teams will suffer a big defeat at some time.

When the season kicks off we will find out if the Knights are a credible team.

Their first home game is on September 2, against Sydney United at North Harbour Stadium. Sydney also has a new striker, in ex-Aston Villa and Manchester United player Dwight Yorke.

Sydney coach Pierre Littbarski says Yorke is struggling to adapt to the Australian league.

But he is a quality striker and it will be interesting to see how the Knights deal with him.

I'll keep an open mind on the Knights, watch how they play and crucify them if they lose.

Paul Halton is an AUT Graduate Diploma in journalism student.

Kiwis win Aussie Rules international cup

by Aaron Lawton

The New Zealand Aussie Rules team, the Falcons, have won the Australian Football International Cup.

They outclassed the Papua New Guinea Mosquitos by 18 points in Melbourne.

The Falcons led after every quarter and held the Mosquitos at bay with two quick goals near the end of the match to secure the trophy.

Utility player John Maling says he is absolutely rapt with the win and that the playing conditions were just inspiring.

"It was just awesome to be out there in front of 40,000 die-hard footy fans watching us under lights at the MCG."

For Maling the tournament was a bitter sweet affair after a broken collar bone in the opening match put him on the sideline for the remainder of the trip.

The New Zealanders fought off the USA in the semi-final to ensure their spot in the final.

Maling says playing in a team that is full of great guys contributed to the Falcons' performance on the field.

"It was just a real cool environment," says Maling.

Falcons' head coach Jim Lucy shares Maling's sentiments and is proud of the team.

"I thought it would be a tough competition but I think our guys were very well prepared," says Lucy.

Lucy has had an involvement with the New Zealand men's team for around five or six years but this year was his first as the head coach.

"It was a great experience to be head coach for sure and this was the best New Zealand team I've ever seen," he says.

After the solid New Zealand performance in Australia, Lucy is now confident the New Zealand game will benefit from the increased public profile of Aussie Rules.

"I think [Aussie Rules] will grow further," he says.

The next tournament is scheduled to be held in Melbourne in 2008.



PHOTO: AARON LAWTON

FOOTY STAR: John Maling chuffed with his team's improvement.

New coach for Waikato Chiefs

by Todd Hewitt

Waikato has a new coach, Warren Gatland, who is back in New Zealand after a successful nine years coaching in Europe.

"I'm delighted to be back." The former Waikato hooker has coached the Irish national side and led the London Wasps to three premierships and one Heineken Cup victory.

He is glad to be home and is ready for the new challenge.

"It is great to be back coaching players who are keen to learn and want to play," says Gatland.

The Waikato has made him feel welcome and is positive about the upcoming season.

"It's what I expected of the Waikato supporters. I know what great supporters they are," he says.

Gatland, who represented Waikato from 1986-1994, was part of the 1992 Waikato team that won the NPC and played in the Ranfurly Shield winning side of 1993.

Gatland has signed with Waikato for three seasons and is optimistic about his chances.

"In that period we want to win something – that's what the goal will be," he says.

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