

FOOTBALL COMES HOME

The Early Days of Western Sydney Wanderers FC



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This article documents the early history of Western Sydney Wanderers FC, covering the 7-month period from the announcement of the new club in April 2012 through to round 5 of the 2012/2013 A-league season in November 2012. It follows the memorable journey of the birth and formation of the new club during its early period of existence. The following topics are covered and provide a chronological account of the club's early days:

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The club was put together from scratch in just 186 days in time for the beginning of the 2012/2013 season. This included the undertaking of an extensive community engagement process, with the feedback received defining the base upon which the club would be built. Numerous milestones in the formation of the club were accomplished in such a short time frame, a testament to the passion of the club staff as well as the fans.

Thanks to this hard work, Western Sydney finally had a long-overdue club representing the culture and values of the region, an area comprising of approximately 2 million people, 14 local government areas, 7 football associations, over 120,000 grassroots football participants and a host of state competition clubs. The heartland of football in Australia was now represented in the national competition after years of waiting. Western Sydney Wanderers FC had arrived.

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ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW SYDNEY CLUB

Pre-announcement speculation

Between December 2011 and March 2012 there was significant speculation and reporting in the media that Football Federation Australia (FFA) was strongly considering the introduction of a Western Sydney based team into the A-league.

A Western Sydney team had been on the FFA's agenda ever since the collapse of the Sydney Rovers consortium in December 2010. The Sydney Rovers were planned to be the club for Western Sydney and had started off brightly with a raft of exciting announcements which had the fans dreaming of big things. But the excitement was short-lived, as the club fell over before its scheduled entry into the 2011/2012 A-league season, unable to secure investors just over a year after receiving a provisional licence from the FFA.

With the failure of the still-born Sydney Rovers, the A-league had entered a period of consolidation, where, following the failure of Australia's FIFA World Cup 2018/2022 bid, and the decline of the Australian national team, the A-league expansion team North Queensland Fury had folded due to financial issues, another expansion team in Gold Coast United was failing to achieve a good community standing, and a number of A-league clubs were experiencing financial difficulty.

The FFA had become occupied with keeping the national competition afloat at 10 teams, and the prospects for the introduction of a Western Sydney A-league team looked grim for the foreseeable future as expansion of the competition looked to have been put on hold.

The inclusion of a Western Sydney team in the national competition had long been considered ever since the NSL Task Force, in its review of the former National Soccer League in 2003, recommended that a Western Sydney club be part of the A-league from the outset of the new national competition. The NSL Task Force had in fact recommended multiple Sydney teams, yet the FFA preferred instead to implement its "one team per city" model, choosing to include only one Sydney team at the inception of the A-league in 2005.

The winning Sydney bid in Sydney FC had a preference to play at Parramatta Stadium in Western Sydney, the game's heartland. This concept however was scuttled when FFA Chairman Frank Lowy, who had also taken a financial stake in the new club, moved the club to the Sydney Football Stadium to be based in Sydney's eastern suburbs, against the wishes of its main backer, Football New South Wales (then Soccer NSW), which in response pulled out of its involvement with Sydney FC altogether.

A second Sydney team was then prevented from being considered in an expansion of the competition for a number of years, with the FFA intent on providing Sydney FC with exclusive territorial rights to the Sydney market. Instead, expansion of the competition following its inception had seen the FFA prefer to plant new clubs in other parts of Australia before the introduction of a Western Sydney team, a strategy that largely failed.

Western Sydney, a proud region with an admired football pedigree, had been without a club for the first 7 seasons of the A-league, and a legion of fans were waiting for their own team to finally enter the national competition.

In February 2012, as the Gold Coast United club continued to attract small crowds and generate little community interest, relations between the FFA and the club's billionaire owner Clive Palmer worsened as a very public stoush was played out in the media between the 2 parties over the failings of the club as well as the FFA's failings in the running of the sport and the national competition. FFA Chairman Frank Lowy described the club as a "spectacular failure", a large part due to Palmer's autocratic style in the club's running.



Frank Lowy

Legitimate issues were raised by both sides, however Palmer's statements and behaviour were increasingly seen to be damaging to the game and the FFA took the dramatic decision on the 29th of February 2012 to take back Gold Coast United's A-league license. The FFA, through Head of A-league Lyall Gorman, would take over the running of the club for the remainder of the season and many believed that the club would be officially cut from the A-league following the season's conclusion.

There was widespread speculation that behind the scenes the FFA was planning for the introduction of a Western Sydney team into the A-league. FFA Chairman Frank Lowy conducted a number of media interviews, stating that Western Sydney was his priority.

There were reports that the FFA was speaking to potential investors, such as: Lucas Neill (current Australian national team captain) as an investor and a player in the club's second season; Nick Tana (businessman and founding shareholder of Perth Glory); Remo Nogarotto (CEO of strategist company Crosby Textor and former Soccer Australia chairman); Paul Lederer (owner of Primo Smallgoods); Ron Malek (CEO of corporate advisory firm Caliburn); and Anton Tagliaferro (investment banker). Despite the FFA's best efforts it appeared that it could not find investors willing to commit to the new club.

The FFA had to maintain a 10-team competition in order to negotiate a lucrative new television deal. It appeared that a fast-tracked Western Sydney team or Gold Coast United would fight it out for the 10th place in the competition – a competition that would not likely expand for a number of years. The introduction of a Western Sydney team into the A-league and the coming of the Sydney Derby were seen as attractive selling points in broadcast negotiations. Speculation for the new Western Sydney club had reignited interest in the fans from the region, but with a lack of investors willing to support the new club, and with speculation that Gold Coast United would remain in the competition under a new ownership structure, it looked unlikely that a Western Sydney club would be entering the A-league for the forceable future.

Many commentators were also keen to point out the difficulty in establishing a new club in Western Sydney in such a short timeframe before the start of the next season. A Western Sydney club needed to be built correctly and many stressed that the lead-in process before entry should be 2 to 3 years. The overall expectation was that Gold Coast United would remain in the competition. Despite this, hope remained, and the football fans of Western Sydney were holding their breath in anticipation. Perhaps they would finally have a club to support very soon.

Late on Tuesday evening the 3rd of April 2012, Sydney's The Daily Telegraph newspaper published an online article stating that the following day the FFA would be announcing a new Western Sydney A-league club. This news was completely unexpected. Twitter went crazy, websites and online forums were abuzz with speculation, and the fans went into a frenzy of anticipation.

Early the following day (Wednesday the 4th of April) the Telegraph published full articles in its print media and online detailing the announcements that would be made by the FFA later that day. For many people it was all too good to be true. The fans went into waiting, eagerly looking forward to the announcements scheduled to occur that Wednesday afternoon.

New Sydney club announced

At 2pm on Wednesday the 4th of April 2012, FFA Chief Executive Officer Ben Buckley made the official announcement that a new A-league club based in Western Sydney would be entering the competition in the upcoming 2012/2013 A-league season (season 8). After years of waiting, and one attempt that finished before it was started, the A-league was finally moving into the heartland of football in Australia.

Ben Buckley made the announcement at an outdoor media conference at the Football New South Wales headquarters at Valentine Sports Park, Parklea in Western Sydney. Flanked by Australian Prime Minister Julie Gillard, various football representatives, media, players and a number of politicians from the region, Buckley stated that the FFA had been developing the club for a number of months, talking to potential investors, stadiums, local councils, prospective CEO's and prospective coaches. Buckley stated: "From next season, West Sydney, the heartland for football in Australia, will be represented in the A-League. It has taken time, but I believe the time is now right."



Ben Buckley announces the new club

The FFA was desperate to include a club from Western Sydney, a region regarded as the heartland of football in Australia. It had finally accepted the wisdom of playing football to its strengths. Western Sydney was a tower of strength. It had huge grassroots football participation, excellent football infrastructure, a host of strong state competition clubs that included some of the most successful clubs in the former National Soccer League, and had produced some of Australia's greatest ever footballers. The Western Sydney club would in all likelihood lead the charge in bringing the A-league back to good health after its recent period of consolidation. The FFA now had just 6 months to put everything together before the start of the season in early October 2012. Ben Buckley vowed that Western Sydney would be ready come the start of the season.

The new club would be completely owned and funded by the FFA for the start-up period of 3 years with a view to then selling off the club once it was financially viable. The FFA's modelling indicated that the club would break financially even within a 3 year period. The FFA had run out of time and patience in finding private investors willing to take the losses associated with the start-up of the club and would instead take the lead in this matter. The governing body would utilise its recent experience in taking temporary ownership of A-league clubs in financial difficulty, being Adelaide United and Brisbane Roar, which had been later sold on to private investors. FFA Chairman Frank Lowy had also recently sold his share in ownership of Sydney FC assumingly to avoid a perceived conflict of interest with the FFA-owned Western Sydney club.

Such an approach, where the FFA would own and establish the club in its start-up phase before later selling it off could potentially be used as a model to follow when the governing body again considered expansion of the competition to other regions in the future. The recent failures of the 3 expansion clubs was in part due to the global financial downturn occurring during that time, which had made it difficult for new clubs to establish and become financially viable. The new top-down approach by the FFA would provide the resources necessary to carry out the start-up phase and eliminate losses for private investors.

Some comparisons were made with the way in which Melbourne Victory had been established at the inception of the A-league in 2005, where the FFA financially assisted the club in its first year in order to allow it to enter the league. Just as in the case of Western Sydney, Melbourne was then seen as a crucial market for the competition and the FFA was determined to ensure a team from that city be represented in the league due to its enormous potential. Within a few seasons Melbourne Victory had established itself as the biggest and best supported club in the competition.

The prospect was raised that in the future the new Western Sydney club could be sold off through a community ownership model, where members would own and run the club. The club could be used as a benchmark model for other clubs to follow when considering community ownership. Buckley was adamant that the FFA would support the club for however long it would take until a new ownership structure was achieved.

The stakes were high. The FFA had taken the risk to create a club in the most lucrative football region in Australia in just 6 months. Worryingly, the FFA's track record in undertaking the expansion of the A-league had been very poor. If the FFA were to fail here, like with North Queensland Fury, Gold Coast United and Sydney Rovers, it might take a generation to recover. Western Sydney in all likelihood would make or break the A-league. Football personality Les Murray would write at the time: "This is not an area where a football club can bank on a roll-up of 'tourists' – the trendy and curious who come to the football because it's the 'in' thing to do and then evaporate as soon as they discover something more fashionable. This club cannot be treated and marketed like a Northern Spirit or even a Sydney FC. This largely will be a club for the already converted. To engage them from the start and to treat them with respect – as supporters and not customers – is critical."

Despite the short timeframe, it was of some comfort to know that, despite the appearance that the club was being rushed in, the FFA had already built up a wealth of knowledge from the previous Western Sydney bidding process undertaken in 2009. It was clear that the club wasn't being rushed in, but was in fact a long time coming. The FFA had also experienced working within a short timeframe at the inception of the A-league in 2005 when all A-league clubs had to be built from scratch prior to the commencement of the season. A similar situation also occurred when the Wellington Phoenix was hastily entered into the competition at the end of the 2006/2007 season.

Buckley made it clear that the club's board would have autonomy from the FFA and would make the ultimate decisions for the club. The community would also be involved in the formation of the club, where fans would have the opportunity to vote on the club's name and colours. The club would field an A-league team, a W-league team and a National Youth League team in its inaugural season.



The Australian federal government pledged \$3m in federal funding for an upgrade of the Football NSW state federation headquarters, which would potentially also be used as the club's headquarters in the future following the completion of the upgrade works. Another \$4m would be provided for the development of the club and for community outreach purposes. Prime Minister Julia Gillard stated: "This has long been a dream for Western Sydney. This is going to become an important place for the future of Sydney and for the future of football. We want to see our kids out in the sunshine playing football. This is a big win for Western Sydney and a big win for football."

It was widely tipped that the club would play at Parramatta Stadium. The irony was that the FFA was now supporting the introduction of a Western Sydney based club playing at Parramatta Stadium in partnership with Football NSW - a proposal which the FFA had shunned at the inception of the A-league in 2005.

The FFA until now had been intent on staying out of the club ownership business. Therefore the decision to fully bankroll a Western Sydney team was seen as a complete backflip on this position. Supporters of North Queensland Fury and Gold Coast United, as well as Ian Rowden of the Sydney Rovers bid were left bemused at the FFA's sudden change in policy, as these clubs/bids were unable to also receive a similar top-down approach from the FFA.

The day after the announcement of the new Western Sydney club the FFA officially axed the troubled Gold Coast United club from the A-league on the 5th of April 2012 after just 3 seasons in the competition. Western Sydney would be its replacement. The FFA had now cut two teams from the competition in two seasons and sadly had not appeared to have shown any resolve to keep these clubs afloat. The A-league would remain at 10 teams for the foreseeable future.

The A-league in crisis

On the 10th April 2012, only days after the new Western Sydney club announcement, billionaire owner of the Newcastle Jets, Nathan Tinkler, shocked everyone by handing back the team's A-league license to the FFA. The Jets were suddenly in danger of not fielding a team for the 2012/2013 season and the FFA might well have been forced to take ownership of the club in addition to Western Sydney.

The A-league was in crisis. Tinkler raised legitimate issues in respect to a lack of confidence in the FFA, the heavy financial losses of A-league clubs, the size of the acquisition fee he paid to secure the Jets' license, insurance matters with injured marquee player Jason Culina, continual concern over the A-league's "unsustainable financial model", the lack of say by club owners in the running of the competition and the concern that the FFA was rushing a Western Sydney team into the A-league despite recent pleas by some club owners not to do so. Tinkler had put a lot of his money into the Newcastle Jets which had improved the club's community standing, increased memberships and grown match day crowds. Tinkler was raising legitimate issues which the FFA had to address.

The FFA's plans for a 10 team league in 2012/2013 were thrown into chaos, as was its negotiations regarding a new, lucrative TV deal that was expected to deliver greater financial security to the competition and its clubs. The FFA was not in a position to fund two A-league teams and it rejected Tinkler's actions, stating that he would need to honour his commitment to fund and support the Newcastle Jets. Concerns were raised as to whether Western Sydney would enter the competition in the 2012/2013 season as had been planned.

Crisis averted

The big issues concerning the FFA and the running of the A-league which had been simmering away in the background for some time now had rightly been brought to the front and centre for open debate in the media and at FFA headquarters. The A-league could not continue on unless an improved management structure for the competition was implemented. After weeks of uncertainty and after significant lobbying by the Jets' fans, FFA Chairman Frank Lowy and Nathan Tinkler finally resolved their dispute and Tinkler took back the Newcastle Jets license. The Jets would be playing in the 2012/2013 season after all. The first meeting of the Joint A-League Strategic Committee, involving representatives of club owners and the FFA, was also held, paving the way for a greater say by the clubs in the running of the competition.

The A-league appeared to have emerged from one of the darker points in its short history. The recent events with Gold Coast United and the Newcastle Jets would act as lessons for the FFA in respect to the way in which the new Western Sydney club should be formed. The FFA would need to ensure that the future owner of the club would have the club's best interests at heart and that good community engagement would be vital to the club's success. Furthermore, the future of the A-league would be sustainable only if it were run under the correct financial model. The FFA was now in a position to build a successful Western Sydney club and at the same time carry out improvements to the A-league to ensure better financial viability of the competition.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN CLUB FORMATION

'New Sydney Club' established

Working under a tight timeframe, the FFA quickly moved to begin a community engagement process to assist in the club's formation. The club went under the temporary name of 'New Sydney Club'. An official club homepage was created on the FFA website, whilst Facebook and Twitter accounts were also created. The Twitter and Facebook accounts were constantly active throughout the engagement process and regular news items were posted on the club website. The use of the online realm was the primary way in which the fans were updated with club announcements. Any persons interested in the club were encouraged to register on the club website in order to receive club emails and notices.

Public fan forums held

The club organised a series of public fan forums to be held at 7 locations across the Western Sydney region. This would provide the community with the opportunity to have a say into the make-up of the new club. This was a welcome initiative in comparison to the failed Sydney Rovers consortium and other bids in the previous Western Sydney bidding process which had done little to consult the fans on the key issues concerning club formation. The fan forums were held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Announcements about the upcoming fan forums, such as dates, times and locations were provided only days prior to the event, being a short notice period to potential attendees. Despite this the fan forums were well attended and much input was provided by the community.

The fan forums followed an agenda covering the topics of:

1. Culture and values
2. Playing style and personnel
3. Club name, colours, logo
4. Home grounds
5. Questions

Audience members were encouraged to contribute their views and ask questions. The forums were chaired by FFA Head of Communications, Kyle Patterson. A panel consisting of between 2 to 4 football people were situated at a table at the front of the room to answer questions, contribute to the discussion and listen. The evenings began at 7:30pm and lasted about 2 hours.



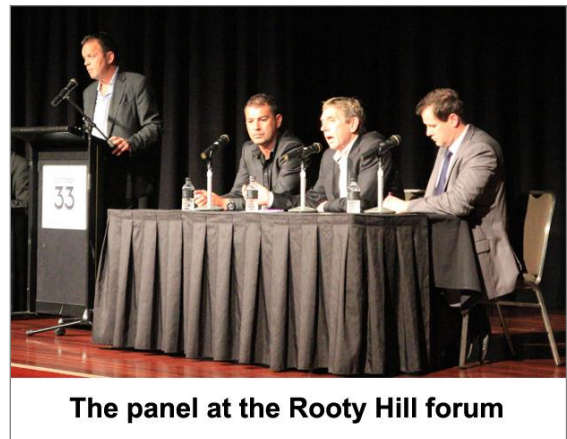
Fans vote at the Mount Pritchard forum

Around 100 to 200 people attended each fan forum, bringing a total of around 1000 attendees for the 7 meetings. Attendees ranged in cultural and ethnic backgrounds, age groups, gender etc and provided a suitable representation of the fans of the Western Sydney region. Votes on various topics were taken by a show of hands throughout the evenings. Audience members were generally well behaved and respectful to the process despite the at-times heated discussions which took place. The club kept fans informed with live Twitter updates during the forums. Fans who could not attend were able to follow the Twitter updates and contribute their views via Twitter in real-time.

At the conclusion of the evenings, the fans and panel members mingled informally, which provided further opportunities for fans to pose questions and discuss issues. The panel members were generally very approachable and happy to talk. The club also posted summaries of each meeting on the club website the following day, however the summaries were limited in their content so as to not influence the discussions at upcoming fan forums. The Daily Telegraph newspaper published an article reporting on the Penrith forum, whilst SBS Television reported on the Mount Pritchard forum.

The make-up of the panel members varied with each fan forum, however Lyall Gorman (FFA Head of A-league) was a panel member at all 7 forums. Most panel members had strong connections with the Western Sydney region. Overall, the persons who contributed as panel members at one or more of the 7 fan forums included:

- Ben Buckley (FFA CEO)
- Lyall Gorman (FFA Head of A-league)
- Mark Bosnich (Fox Sports commentator and former NSL, Australian national team, Chelsea, Manchester United and Central Coast Mariners player)
- Robert Sestan (Football NSW Chairman)
- Tom Smithies (The Daily Telegraph newspaper football reporter)
- Eddie Moore (Football NSW CEO)
- Mark Rudan (Fox Sports commentator and former NSL, Sydney FC and Adelaide United player)
- Ed Husic (Federal Parliament Member for Chifley)
- Chad Gibson (former NSL and Queensland Roar player)
- Luke Casserly (former NSL and Australian national team player)
- David Zdrilic (SBS commentator, former NSL, Australian national team and Sydney FC player)
- Ray Richards (former NSL player and Australian national team player at the 1974 FIFA World Cup)
- Heather Garriock (Sydney FC W-League player)
- Milan Blagojevic (former NSL and Australian national team player)
- Alex Tobin (Football NSW Technical Director and former NSL and Australian national team player)



The panel at the Rooty Hill forum

The fan forums were held at the following locations:

1. Mount Pritchard (Mounties Club) on 12th April 2012
 - Panel: Ben Buckley, Lyall Gorman, Mark Bosnich and Robert Sestan
 - Attendance: over 200 people
2. Parramatta (Riverside Theatre) on 17th April 2012
 - Panel: Lyall Gorman and Ray Richards
 - Attendance: over 150 people
3. Rooty Hill (Rooty Hill RSL) on 19th April 2012
 - Panel: Lyall Gorman, Mark Rudan and Ed Husic
 - Attendance: over 100 people
4. Penrith (Joan Sutherland Centre) on 24th April 2012
 - Panel: Lyall Gorman, Tom Smithies and Eddie Moore
 - Attendance: over 100 people
5. Castle Hill (Castle Hill RSL) on 26th April 2012
 - Panel: Lyall Gorman, Milan Blagojevic and Alex Tobin
 - Attendance: over 100 people
6. Campbelltown (Campbelltown Leagues Club) on 1st May 2012
 - Panel: Lyall Gorman, David Zdrilic and Heather Garriock
 - Attendance: over 100 people
7. Bankstown (Bankstown Sports Club) on 3rd May 2012
 - Panel: Lyall Gorman, Mark Bosnich, Chad Gibson and Luke Casserly
 - Attendance: 100 people

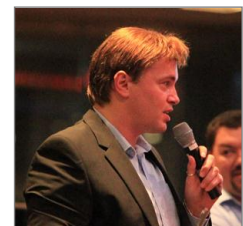


Ben Buckley speaks at the first fan forum

The first fan forum at the Mounties Club is regarded as the most memorable. Many audience members took the opportunity to passionately state their views to the crowd and panel members that were present in the packed function room. It was an occasion mixed with excitement but also some tension. The recent announcement of the new Western Sydney club had caused great joy, yet the fan forum was also held just days after Nathan Tinkler had handed back his Newcastle Jets license, casting severe doubts over the resolve of the FFA in dealing with the issues facing

football in Australia. Many important issues were discussed regarding the club and overall it was an evening that those in attendance were proud to have been part of. SBS television was also there to report on the forum.

It was admirable that senior FFA figures such as Ben Buckley and Lyall Gorman were willing to attend the fan forum and chose to show their faces to hear what the fans wanted to say, allowing the public to vent its frustrations, clear the air and contribute their views. Because of this, the FFA gained much credibility. Mark Bosnich also played an important role where his contributions were able to ease some heated discussions. His passion, intelligence and charisma earned great respect from the fans in the room.



Mark Bosnich

Summary of fan feedback received

The 7 fan forums provided an insight into the overwhelming passion that the Western Sydney people have for football. The club would likely have some of the most passionate football fans in Australia. There was also a strong sense of pride and ownership of the Western Sydney region. The fans were proud of where they came from. It was strongly evident that the introduction of a Western Sydney based A-league club was long overdue and that Sydney FC, based in Sydney's east, had largely failed to engage the Western Sydney community despite being Sydney's only A-league representative up until that point. Ray Richards summed up the feeling of the fans perfectly when, speaking from the audience at the first fan forum, he boldly declared: "this meeting is 8 years too late" to loud applause.

There were calls from the audience for the FFA not to let the club fail. Ben Buckley stated that this time would be different and that the community would be engaged from the outset. The FFA was looking to build the club from the bottom up, starting with the fans. Western Sydney was already full of educated football fans who would know garbage when they saw it. The fans were not interested in gimmicks. They just wanted a professional club in the A-League to represent them.

Across all 7 fan forums, the overwhelming majority of fans shared common opinions in respect to key issues concerning the club.

The fans desired a club that would be truly representative of the Western Sydney region. Community engagement would be the foundation of the club, and the prospects for a potential future community ownership model for the club were welcomed. Some also suggested that a fan representative one day be part of the club board. Players would be expected to have a community presence, to get out into the schools and out into the community. The club would reflect the unique multi-cultural diversity of the Western Sydney region - a region consisting of a diverse group of people who see themselves as part of Australian society and have pride in being from Western Sydney. The club could potentially be the biggest and best-supported team in the competition if it were to successfully tap into the passion of the fans from the region and harness the variety of ideas and experiences that they would be bringing to the competition. Football, the world game, had already been in the blood of fans in the region for generations. They were already converts to the game.



Fans at the Parramatta forum

There was widespread support that the club lead the process of healing and building with Sydney's former National Soccer League (NSL) clubs, most of which now played in NSW state competitions. It would mend the bridges between the "old soccer" community and "new football". The clean slate begun by the FFA back in 2005, where it had replaced the NSL with the A-league and favoured only broad-based, non-ethnic aligned clubs, still alienated many people.

The FFA had met with a number of former NSL clubs the day before the first fan forum to get their input on what they would like to see from the new club and how both entities could co-

exist in a mutually beneficial way moving into the future. Acknowledging the pioneers of football and their contributions to the sport were imperative to rebuilding those bridges.

It was desired that the club would develop links with local football associations and clubs from the region. It would be a "working class" club, an underdog team known to be brave and positive. Emphasis would be on stability and in being part of a Western Sydney family. Fans wanted a team culture focused on collective goals rather than the individual. The club would need to stand by the coach's long term vision and provide the support and time necessary to allow the vision to be achieved. The club would ideally play creative, attacking, attractive football. The use of local players and staff would be the backbone of the club. The club would provide a development pathway for local young talent. People such as Paul Okon and Tony Popovic, products of the Western Sydney region, were suggested as potential coaches.

There was an overwhelming view that the word "West/Western" should be included in the name of the new club. People had great pride in the region and believed that the word "West/Western" would strongly reflect the very nature of the club. Despite suggestions that the name would hold the club back by restricting the fanbase only to the Western Sydney region, there was a strong view that Western Sydney had all the things necessary to produce a successful club, such as large state competition clubs, huge grassroots football participation, talented players, infrastructure and a large population base. A staggering statistic provided at the fan forums regarding the history of the Australian national team was that 200-odd Australian national team players from the 400 or so in total hailed from Western Sydney.

There were strong views that the club have a traditional football name instead of a more modern, emotive name. The name "Wanderers" was regularly mentioned and had strong support. Red, black and white were the most commonly mentioned colours preferred for the club, one reason being that they were representative of the football associations of Western Sydney, another reason being that these colours were in complete contrast to the sky blue of Sydney FC.

One of the most heavily discussed issues was in regards to the home ground for the club. Ben Buckley stated that the FFA would be putting forward a proposal for a new stadium in Western Sydney specifically for football to be constructed within 2-3 years. That stadium would be the logical choice as a future home ground for the club. Audience members noted the enormous benefit of the club one day owning its own stadium, club house, training base and academy. Suggestions for locations of the new stadium included potential south-west Sydney locations such as the current Fairfield Showground site and locations in west and north-west Sydney such as the Blacktown International Sportspark site which was proposed to host a new stadium as part of the failed Australian FIFA World Cup bid.



A fan speaks at the Campbelltown forum

There was strong support that the club have only one home ground and that the club not play out of a range of venues across Western Sydney. Parramatta Stadium was an overwhelming preference for the location of the club's home ground due to it being located at the heart of the Western Sydney region, central to the north-west, the west, the south-west and the inner west parts of Western Sydney. The stadium was close to public transport and in good proximity to the Parramatta CBD for pre and post-game activities. The stadium was also a rectangular venue with a 21,000 seat capacity considered an appropriate size to host A-league games. Saturday night games were preferred.



Lyll Gorman at the Penrith forum

The audience was questioned in regards to whether some games should be played out of the 82,000 seat ANZ Stadium (Stadium Australia) at Homebush Bay's Olympic precinct, such as the larger derby games against Sydney FC that would potentially draw large crowds above the capacity of Parramatta Stadium and a greater financial return. The audience overwhelmingly responded in opposition to the idea. The main reason given was the lack of match-day atmosphere that would be generated in ANZ Stadium unless the match drew an unlikely crowd of at least 50-60,000 people. Parramatta Stadium offered a rectangular, smaller, boutique venue that was much better suited to hosting football matches and harnessing match-day

atmosphere as opposed to the large, oval-shaped ANZ Stadium. The fans also did not want to give up "home advantage" by moving the club's most anticipated game of the season against its cross-town rivals away from its regular home ground.

The audience was also posed the question as to their views towards playing the Sydney Derby in round 1 of the season to get the rivalry off to a flying start on a big occasion. Many audience members encouraged the FFA to delay in holding the derby until a few rounds into the season to allow the new club and fans to find their feet and to let the anticipation and excitement build in the weeks leading up to the game.

Online fan surveys launched

On Tuesday the 24th of April 2012 the club launched an online fan survey that covered the same themes as the fan forums, being: culture and values; playing style and personnel; club name, colours, logo; and home grounds. The survey drew upon the initial feedback received from the first 3 fan forums. The online survey was lengthy, comprehensive and included a wide selection of potential names and colour choices.

Notification emails about the survey were sent to all persons who registered and interest in the club, plus to 40,000 registered grassroots players in Western Sydney using the FFA's MyFootballClub grassroots club/player database. The survey was also available to complete on the club website. By the time of closure of the survey a little over a week later on Thursday the 3rd of May 2012 the club had received over 4,000 completed surveys.

Following the completion of the fan forums and the closure of the online fan survey Lyll Gorman hosted a live Twitter question and answer session on the 4th of May 2012. This provided the opportunity for fans to pose further questions to him online in real-time. A summary of the discussions was provided afterwards on the club website.

On Wednesday the 9th of May 2012 a second online fan survey was launched. This second survey provided a shortlist of preferred options for the name and colours of the club that came out of the results of the first online fan survey. An article was published in Sydney's The Daily Telegraph newspaper which encouraged the public to vote.

The survey provided 5 options for the club name, being:

- Athletic
- Wanderers
- Strikers
- Wolves
- Rangers

An option was also provided for other suggestions. The survey stated that the word “Western” would likely feature in the club name.

Three options were provided for the colours of the club, being:

- Red, black and white
- Red and black
- Black and white

The second fan survey would be open for only a 3 day period, closing on Friday the 11th of May 2012. All persons were encouraged to visit the club website to select their preferred options for name and colours. Well after the conclusion of the second fan survey, Lyall Gorman noted that 15,000 fan surveys had been completed. This is most likely the total combined number of the first survey (4,000) and the second survey (11,000).

Following the completion of the fan forums and online surveys, the fans of the new club went into waiting, eagerly anticipating details to be announced of the new club. The fan engagement undertaken by the FFA had been at levels not seen since the beginning of the A-league in 2005. Much interest was focused on how much the FFA would take onboard from the community engagement process to apply in the formation of the new club.

CLUB DETAILS ANNOUNCED

Lyall Gorman announced as CEO and Tony Popovic announced as head coach

On Thursday the 17th of May 2012 at an FFA press conference, FFA CEO Ben Buckley announced that Lyall Gorman had been appointed as the club's inaugural CEO. Gorman had been the FFA's Head of A-league up until this time and had been widely tipped to take on the new club's CEO role. The task at hand in building the club in a short timeframe was immense. Fortunately however, Gorman had a wealth of previous experience as former chairman of the Central Coast Mariners, where he had overseen the formation of the club in its inaugural season. He had also remained a part owner of the Mariners. Gorman hailed from Bankstown in Sydney's West.

At the same press conference, Tony Popovic was announced as the club's inaugural head coach, agreeing to a 4 year deal with the club. Popovic was at that time an assistant coach at Crystal Palace FC in the English Football League. The attraction of building the new club from scratch was enough of a reason for him to reject an offer to remain at Crystal Palace and also to reject approaches from Sydney FC where he had previously been an assistant coach.



Tony Popovic, Lyall Gorman and Ben Buckley

Popovic was a product of Western Sydney and this would be the 38-year old's first position as a head coach. He had been the club's number one preference for the head coach role, and was favoured in front of a number of other coaches who were reported to have shown interest, including former Central Coast Mariners coach Lawrie McKinna. The length of his contract was long compared to other A-league coach appointments, particularly as this was Popovic's debut as a head coach. The contract length was a testament to the faith that the club was placing in Popovic's long term vision and his abilities.

Having played at Sydney United in the NSL in his early days, Tony Popovic had gone on to play in Japan, then for Crystal Palace in England, in Qatar and later at Sydney FC in the A-league. Popovic was a distinguished former Australian national team player and had played for the Socceroos at the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany.

No announcement on the club's name and colours was made. Lyall Gorman stated that these would be revealed soon.

Ante Milicic announced as assistant coach

On the 22nd of May 2012 it was reported that Ante Milicic, at that time an assistant coach at Melbourne Heart, had been signed to the Western Sydney club as an assistant to Tony Popovic. Milicic was a product of Western Sydney and had played with Popovic at Sydney United in the NSL before pursuing a career in Europe and later in the A-league. Milicic was a former Australian national team player and had recently lost out to John Aloisi in his bid to be head coach at Melbourne Heart. Later it was revealed that Melbourne Heart would not allow Milicic to leave the club until a replacement was found. Milicic was unable to officially join the Western Sydney club until the 27th of June.



Ante Milicic

Player speculation

In May and June 2012 there was much media speculation in respect to players and staff who were being pursued by the club. Unconfirmed signings were regularly reported in the media, yet no players or further staff were officially announced. Many of these unconfirmed signings were later officially announced weeks after being reported in the media.

It was also reported that the Western Sydney club were giving players only 1 year deals, allegedly in an attempt to give potential future owners of the club a clean slate in the club's second season. If true, this was a risky strategy, as well-performing talent could potentially leave the club immediately after becoming more valuable. When player signings were announced, details of player contracts were not released.

Lucas Neill and Scott Chipperfield, two high profile Australian national team players, were known to be interested in playing for the club, yet no definitive announcements on these players were made. Chipperfield would later retire from professional football, whilst Neill decided to pursue a lucrative club contract in the United Arab Emirates. The club would eventually form the view that the pursuit of a high profile, marquee player would not be a priority in the club's inaugural season. Clubs were allowed to recruit up to 1 Australian, 1 international and 1 junior marquee player whose salary was exempt from the salary cap imposed on the squad.

Instead, the club would be run to a tight budget and would focus on community and grassroots engagement. Potential marquee players would be selected based on the on-field as well as off-field vision and values of the club. If further pursued, a marquee player would need to generate sufficient financial return to the club to cover the player's high wages.

It appeared that the club would hold off the announcement of the team name, colours, logo, jersey, first player signings and home stadium until all these aspects were ready to combine into one significant announcement. Legal issues with the registering of the club name, and negotiations over a stadium deal also appeared to be delaying any announcements.

A-league season 2012/2013 draw released

On the 19th of June 2012 the A-league season draw for 2012/2013 was released. No indication of the club's name or home stadium was provided, however the dates for the club's fixtures were available. The Western Sydney club would play its round 1 inaugural A-league game at home against the Central Coast Mariners on Saturday the 6th of October 2012. The inaugural derby against Sydney FC would be a home game in round 3 on Saturday the 20th of October 2012. The club's first game against Melbourne Victory, the competition's biggest club, was to be at home in round 8 on the 24th of November.

An article posted on the club website analysing the draw mistakenly leaked the name of the new club as "Western Sydney Wanderers". This article was quickly taken down from the website, but not before many fans were able to glimpse it.

A newspaper article the following day noted that many fans were becoming increasingly concerned as to the absence of any significant announcements by the club for some time, particularly regarding the chosen club name and player signings. The article then indicated that the name of the new club would likely be the "Western Sydney Wanderers", with red and black colours and likely to play out of Parramatta Stadium.

There were also reports that the club was looking towards playing the inaugural Sydney Derby in round 3 at Parramatta Stadium instead of ANZ Stadium due to the potential to generate an intense atmosphere inside the packed venue. It was also speculated that the club would take one-off games to Campbelltown Stadium and Penrith Stadium in the coming years. These stadiums would likely be the venues for the club's W-League and National Youth League teams. Lyall Gorman stated that major announcements about the club would be made on the 25th of June.

Announcement of club name, logo, playing strip and first player signings (Mooy, Elrich and Appiah-Kubi)

At 12 noon on Monday the 25th of June 2012 the new club was officially launched at Parramatta Stadium. At a packed media conference inside the Cumberland Lounge in Parramatta Stadium's western grandstand, Lyall Gorman and Tony Popovic together officially revealed the club's name and logo from behind a curtain. The club would be known as Western Sydney Wanderers FC and it would carry a traditional football logo incorporating the intertwined letters of "WSW" at its centre.



The club logo

Next, Popovic announced the Wanderers' first three players signed to the club, being Western Sydney products Aaron Mooy, Tarek Elrich and Kwabena Appiah-Kubi. Mooy was talented midfielder who had previously been with Bolton Wanderers in England and who was returning home after a stint at St Mirren FC in Scotland. Elrich was an experienced full back who had previously enjoyed a number of successful seasons with the Newcastle Jets in the A-league. He was also a former player of the National Soccer League. Appiah-Kubi was a talented young striker who had impressed in the NSW Premier League and National Youth League with Central Coast Mariners.

The three players entered the press conference sporting bright red club jackets featuring the club logo. Then, it was time to reveal the club strip. The players removed their jackets to reveal that the Nike club home jersey would feature red and black hoops, a traditional football jersey style and something new and unique to the A-league. A hooped jersey had been the subject of much online discussion and support by fans, and it appeared that the FFA had been aware of this. The shorts were white, whilst the socks were black.

The Nike Australia representative at the launch, Paul Faulkner, expressed the company's pleasure to be associated with the Wanderers and how the club had now become part of the Nike family that included some of the biggest clubs in the world.



Tony Popovic, Kwabena Appiah-Kubi, Tarek Elrich, Aaron Mooy, Lyall Gorman and Paul Faulkner reveal the club's home strip



The club launch

The club name, colours, logo and strip were overwhelmingly endorsed by the fans and much appreciation was given to the FFA, which had appeared to have listened to what the fans had wanted. The name, logo and strip were traditional and unique. It clearly felt like a real football club compared to names, logos and playing strips of other clubs in the competition. The club's first three signings were well received by the fans. The club had signed exciting young talent who had developed their trade at some of the Western Sydney region's top state competition clubs.

In attendance at the announcement were representatives from Football NSW, leaders from NSW state competition clubs, as well as representatives from the Western Sydney football associations who represented over 120,000 grassroots players. Lyall Gorman stated that the arrival of the Western Sydney Wanderers into football's heartland was a monumental moment in the history of football in Australia. Gorman stated: "Football's heartland will have its own team in the national competition. The sons and daughters of western Sydney's rich football heritage will get to represent their region on the national stage and beyond across Asia and the world. Even more important is that this club will be different – it will be powered by the proud people of the west."



Mooy, Elrich and Appiah-Kubi at Parramatta Stadium

Gorman noted that the decisions regarding the club name, logo, colours and strip were all based on the feedback provided by the community engagement undertaken and that the community would continue to be engaged. The FFA had listened to what the fans wanted and they had delivered it. The official club logo incorporated the key elements of the Western Sydney landscape; the mountains, valleys and winding river system that runs throughout the region. The badge captured the unity and intertwined multicultural community that the Wanderers would represent. The name "Wanderers" had important relevance to the new club. In 1880, not far from Parramatta Stadium, the first ever game of football was played in New South Wales. This was a game

between the King's School and a club called the Wanderers, at the Parramatta Common, known to be the site currently occupied by the Old Kings Oval, located only metres from Parramatta Stadium. Gorman felt there was a huge responsibility to honour that history and build on that legacy. For that reason he would refer to Western Sydney Wanderers as the "newest, oldest club in Australian football." The club was to honour the history of the Wanderers of 1880, the migration boom of the 1950s that gave football its passion and pedigree, the heady days of the National Soccer League and the modern era of phenomenal grassroots growth among boys and girls.

Lyall Gorman could only confirm at the press conference that Parramatta Stadium would host “some games” and that negotiations were being finalised in respect to a stadium deal. Gorman did confirm that the round 1 game against the Central Coast Mariners on the 6th of October would be held at Parramatta Stadium. Uncertainty still revolved around whether the club would play any games at ANZ Stadium. The fans had to wait for an answer to this question. It was also revealed that if the club were to base itself at Parramatta Stadium, plans were being considered to rename the grandstands to respected football players during the A-league season.



The club logo adorns the field

The three new players, coach, CEO and Nike representative posed for photos and conducted interviews. A nice addition was that the club's logo was painted onto the centre circle of Parramatta Stadium. It was an historic day in so many ways.

A new club homepage at www.wswanderersfc.com.au based on the new official club name was launched, along with new Twitter (@WSWanderersFC) and Facebook (WSWanderersFC) accounts. This would ensure that the fans would continue to be engaged and updated with club announcements.

Ron Corry (goalkeeping coach), Trevor Morgan (National Youth League coach) and John Tsatsimas (General Manager Football Operations) announced

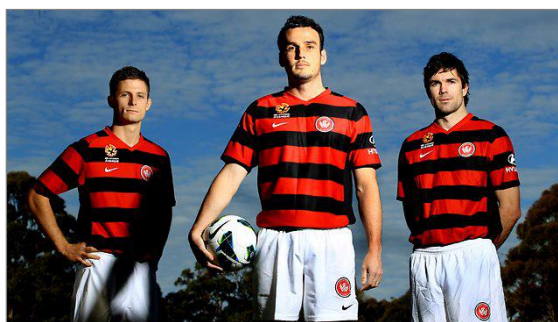
On the 27th of June 2012 Ante Milicic was officially appointed as an assistant coach, whilst Ron Corry was appointed as goalkeeping coach and Trevor Morgan as National Youth League coach. At 70 years of age Ron Corry was a former Australian national team player and had also forged a successful career as a player and head coach in the former NSL. Trevor Morgan was a well-respected development coach who had most recently been a head coach in the NSW Premier League. Morgan would now begin recruitment of the club's National Youth League squad.

John Tsatsimas was also announced as General Manager Football Operations. Tsatsimas was former CEO of Newcastle Jets and would work closely with Lyall Gorman and the coaching staff in the recruitment of players and the football side of the business.

Cole, Beauchamp, Bridge and Topor-Stanley announced as signings

On the 29th of June 2012, Shannon Cole, Michael Beauchamp and Mark Bridge were officially confirmed as signings. All three players were Western Sydney products.

Cole was a defender, a Socceroo and a former Sydney FC player. Beauchamp was a defender, a Socceroo who had the experience of being to two FIFA World Cups, and had played in Germany, Denmark, the UAE and in the A-league with Central Coast Mariners, Melbourne Heart and most recently with Sydney FC. He was also a former player of the NSL.



Shannon Cole, Mark Bridge and Michael Beauchamp



Nikolai Topor-Stanley

Bridge was also a former player of the NSL, a striker, and a Socceroo who had had previously found great success with the Newcastle Jets and Sydney FC in the A-league.

Nikolai Topor-Stanley, a Canberra product, was confirmed as a signing on the 30th of June. Topor-Stanley was an experienced defender, a Socceroo who had previously played for Sydney FC, Perth Glory and Newcastle Jets in the A-league.

Community visits by players begin

The first community engagement by players of the club occurred when Tarek Elrich and Mark Bridge visited Springwood United FC in the Nepean Districts on the 30th of June 2012 to meet the supporters and watch the Nepean Districts representative teams in action.

It would be the first of many grassroots and community visits by players of the club in the Western Sydney region. Wanderers' players regularly attended events to assist associations, clubs, organisations and communities throughout the region. These included a number of school holiday clinics with youngsters. The visits made an important contribution to building the relationships between the club and the community, raising the club's profile and community standing. Players and staff also regularly conducted media interviews and promoted the club.



Players visit the community

First official training session and announcement of Covic and Haliti as signings



The squad's first training session

The first official training session for the club players occurred at 10am on Monday the 2nd of July 2012 at the Blacktown International Sportspark at Rooty Hill, at the athletics centre. It was an open training session where fans were able to watch the historic occasion. The club logo was painted on the centre circle of the field and club flags were throughout the facility. The training centre truly felt like a home base for the Wanderers.

Two additional club signings were revealed at the training session, being Western Sydney product Ante Covic, and Labinot Haliti, a Kosovo refugee who had migrated to Western Sydney.

Covic was an experienced goalkeeper, a Socceroo who had been to one World Cup and who had played in Europe as well as in the A-league with Newcastle Jets and Melbourne Victory. He was also a former player of the NSL. Haliti was also a former player of the NSL, a striker who had played in Europe as well as in the A-league with the Newcastle Jets. All but one of the signed players took part in the session, along with a number of trialists. Around 80-100 fans attended the training session.



Ante Covic

Labinot Haliti



Tony Popovic at training

Tony Popovic stated that he would build a squad that would be competitive in the club's first season. Popovic had chosen a measured approach to building the squad. Player recruitment was slow, ensuring that he had sufficient time to assess and recruit players that fit his and the club's vision, both on and off the field. Popovic made known his intention to instil his playing style on the team, where he hoped to achieve a modern, attractive, possession-based style of play, where the team would have a positive, winning mentality. It would be a playing style that the fans would be proud of.

The pre-season had officially begun. Regular training sessions occurred at the Blacktown International Sportspark athletics centre and adjacent fields. The venue was likely to remain the club's training venue for the foreseeable future until a permanent base was secured.

Stephen Roche announced as W-League coach

On the 5th of July 2012 Stephen Roche was appointed as W-League coach. Roche had a number of year experience in the coaching of women's football and had previously coached the Central Coast Mariners W-league team. He would now begin recruitment of the club's W-league squad.

Open training session to fans

Another open training session was held on Thursday the 12th of July 2012 at the Blacktown International Sportspark athletics centre, attracting around 250 fans, many of them children on school holidays. The players were keen to meet the fans and conduct interviews. Tony Popovic said that he was also looking to sign some foreign players to the team.



Tony Popovic speaks with the players



Players sign autographs after training

FORMATION OF SUPPORTERS GROUP

WestSydneyFootball.com launched

On the 20th of March 2012, after considerable speculation that a Western Sydney club was to be introduced into the A-league, a passionate football fan from Western Sydney created and launched a professional, independent fan website at www.WestSydneyFootball.com where all supporters of the new club could gather to discuss the club online, discuss active support and discuss other topics relating to football in the Western Sydney region. The website provides a news article page, discussion forum, supporters' online shop, match/player database, podcast and a fixture calendar.

WestSydneyFootball.com quickly became the number one website for online discussion of the club. Regular news articles are published on the website regarding the club, the supporters and football generally in Western Sydney. Twitter (@WestSydney) and Facebook (West Sydney Football) accounts were also created, linking to the website. The online sphere is a powerful means in which to engage and inform the Western Sydney football community. It also provides a valuable source of fan feedback to the club.



WestSydneyFootball.com is a neutral website where any individual or supporter group can come to discuss the club and other topics online. Representatives of the website have contact with the club and regularly provide fan feedback. Website members have conducted media interviews to provide fan reactions to club announcements. The website is a discussion point for the club's main active fan support group, the Red & Black Bloc (RBB).

Red and Black Bloc formed

The first ever meeting of the club's main active support fan group occurred on Sunday the 3rd of June 2012 at the Woolpack Hotel in Parramatta. The meeting had been advertised on WestSydneyFootball.com and attracted about 40 people, including some persons who were not members of the website. The objective was to get all the various people and parties together in one place to talk about active support for the club. The outcome was very positive and there was a general agreement to move forward as one united group in the support of the club.

It was outstanding that that on a cold, wet Sunday evening in Parramatta, 40-odd fans had gotten together to discuss the support of a club which at that stage had no name, colours, jersey, stadium or players. The meeting had a joyful atmosphere. Everyone got along and shared their views in a pleasant setting. The big issues were discussed – group culture, values and code of conduct. All the fans who attended had an opportunity to contribute to the discussions and everyone learned from each other on the night.

There were people who attended that had experience in active support and were keen to share their knowledge and opinions. The passion and ideas expressed for what it means to support a football club were unrivalled. The desire was for the home end to have 100%, non-stop commitment to support and inspire the team for the whole 90 minutes of the game. There was a desire for an independent and inclusive home end where various styles of support could be incorporated and where the culture of the group could develop organically over time.

The supporters would create an amazing spectacle inside the stadium and provide Wanderers games with the unique atmosphere and passionate support that is seen at football games around the world - the type of support which makes a game of football so special to experience. The group then broke out in its first ever chant of 'Western Sydney Ole Ole Ole'. Everyone was excited about the future.

The Woolpack Hotel offered to be the group's home pub for pre-match and post-match gatherings on match days, as well as any other socials and events – an offer that was happily accepted by the group. No name of the group was decided due to the club's name and colours not yet being announced at that point in time. The meeting served as an initial discussion to address a number of important topics and for supporters to meet each other in person to put names to faces.

The first fan interview conducted by a representative of the website/active support group was made to the Sydney Morning Herald on the 12th of July 2012. The article covered the fans' reaction to a proposal by the club to rename the stands at Parramatta Stadium to respected football players.

The second active support meeting occurred on Saturday evening the 14th of July 2012 at the Woolpack Hotel, where the core aspects of the group were discussed and decided upon. The meeting was again advertised on WestSydneyFootball.com and attracted about 70 people. The club CEO, Lyall Gorman as well as Rob Squillaciotti from FFA attended the meeting after being invited by representatives of the group. This was an outstanding gesture by Lyall Gorman, who was keen to demonstrate the club's eagerness to engage the fans.

Lyall Gorman addressed the group at the beginning of the meeting and answered questions from the fans regarding the club's stance in respect to active support, as well as questions regarding the progress in the formation of the club. Gorman was honest and approachable and was keen to build a healthy relationship. The fans were generally impressed with Gorman's vision for the club, his attitude towards active support, and the value he placed on active support in contributing to game-day atmosphere.



The Red and Black Bloc takes shape

Lyall Gorman departed the meeting and the key discussions of the active support meeting then took place. The first vote of the evening was in regards to the name of the home end active support group. A vote was taken in favour of the "Red and Black Bloc". Spontaneous chanting of "RBB, RBB" then broke out in the room. The group was happy with the name, which had been a favourite in the online voting conducted prior to the meeting.

Core active support leaders were nominated and spoke to the group about their vision for the home end.

Everyone was impressed and excited about what they had to say. The group planned to build the active support style organically, inclusive of various styles. The group then broke out in a chant of 'Western Sydney Ole Ole Ole' and filled the pub with noise. It was a memorable moment.

The meeting was very successful. All attendees made Lyall Gorman feel quite welcome. The fans had a great night together and looked forward to growing the group and creating an amazing home end on match days. The attendees came from all over Sydney and beyond, and came from a wide variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, indicative of the broad range of supporters who would be following the club. This meant that a variety of different ideas and styles would be incorporated into match-day support, with some concepts being new to the A-league. A Facebook page (Red and Black Bloc) was created following the meeting, keeping fans updated with RBB events.

A fan interview was published by the Australian Four Four Two website on the 19th of July 2012 that covered the active supporter's group meeting. The article published the group's name and website. The fan representative that was interviewed stated that the "Red and Black Bloc" name represents the concept of "a union, a pact, an alliance" that fans can unite under. It also represents the melting pot of Western Sydney, which is a diverse area, getting behind one team. The name has some loose political connotations but the group wished to distance itself from such connections.

After a lengthy process of design, discussion and online voting, the Red and Black Bloc released its official logo on the 31st of July 2012. The hooded figure in full voice represents the raw passion and devotion a member of the RBB has for his/her club. It touches upon anonymity and passionate expression in support of the Wanderers.

Representatives of the RBB have conducted a number of media interviews and are in regular contact with the club to provide fan feedback and to organise home end support on match-days. The RBB is run only by the fans and is intent to remain completely independent from the club.



The Red and Black Bloc logo

PRE-SEASON AND FURTHER CLUB ANNOUNCEMENTS

First ever Wanderers game against Nepean FC

The club undertook a busy pre-season schedule of friendly games against A-league clubs and state competition clubs primarily from the Western Sydney region. A total of 10 pre-season games were scheduled. Most games were mid-week and were generally poorly advertised, yet well attended. The matches provided the chance for the squad to gel, whilst also offering the opportunity for various trialists to push for a contract. Pre-season also saw the continued formation of the club off the field with a number of major club announcements, as well as the growth and development of the Red and Black Bloc.

The first ever game of Western Sydney Wanderers FC took place at 7:30pm on Wednesday evening the 25th of July 2012 at Cook Park, a modest suburban ground located in St Marys in Sydney's West near Penrith, against NSW State League Division Two club, Nepean FC. Admission to the match was free.



The starting team for the Wanderers first ever game

The Wanderers starting XI for the match was as follows: Ante Covic (goalkeeper), Tarek Elrich, Michael Beauchamp (captain), Nikolai Topor-Stanley, Adam D'Apuzzo (trialist), Aaron Mooy, Reece Caira (trialist), Labinot Haliti, Jason Trifiro (trialist), Arrache Salim (trialist) and Mark Bridge. Of the 9 players contracted to the club at that time, 2 players (Shannon Cole and Kwabena Appiah-Kubi) were unable to play due to injury. Trialists made up the remainder of the starting team. The remainder of the team sheet named on the bench were all trialists, being: Daniel Barac, Jerrad Tyson (goalkeeper), Zak Elrich, Jack Green, Matt Lewis, Trent McClenahan, Nicholas Modaffari, Stjepan Paric, Yianni Perkatis and Joey Gibbs. The team wore a basic playing kit that was unlikely to be the official home or away team kit. The kit consisted of a white shirt, black sleeves, black shorts and red socks. The shirt featured the club logo, Nike symbol and the A-league badge.



Wanderers FC v Nepean FC

The Red and Black Bloc gathered at the northern end of the ground, numbering around 150 fans. Spontaneous chants of "RBB, RBB" were belted out by the group and reverberated around the ground. Lyall Gorman walked across the pitch to meet the RBB before the match. He said that the supporters were the heart and soul of the club and that he was looking forward to the start of the A-league season. Players Shannon Cole and Kwabena Appiah-Kubi also met with the RBB and posed for photos.



The big crowd at the game

From kick off the Wanderers dominated the game with many shots hitting the woodwork of the opposition goal. Then in the 43rd minute, just before half time, Labinot Haliti took the honour of scoring the club's first ever goal, at the northern end of the ground, right in front of the RBB. The RBB and the rest of the crowd went nuts. Half time came and went. Most of the starting XI was substituted at half time or early in the second half. The team was then made up entirely of trialists. The Wanderers continued to dominate the game. Joey Gibbs, a trialist, scored 4 goals to complete a 5-0 rout by the team. The Wanderers had recorded their first ever win.

The RBB was loud and passionate throughout the game. It provided colour, noise and atmosphere which made it an enjoyable experience for the impressively large crowd of 3,612 people who attended the match. This was a big crowd for a pre-season game. For those who attended, they had witnessed history. Finally, the Western Sydney Wanderers were no longer just an idea. They were born.



The team celebrates its first ever goal

The first ever outing of the RBB had been complete with chanting, drumming, jumping, clapping, flags and banners. The group was in its infancy and many in the RBB had yet to learn the songs and chants. A core of about 50-70 fans were in good sync, belting out chants and leading the group. The rest of the pre-season would provide the opportunity for the chants to become more familiar in the terraces and for the RBB to grow.



The Red and Black Bloc's first outing

Aaron Mooy would later state: "The atmosphere at Nepean was fantastic, a lot better than we expected, to be honest. That's why I play football, to get a buzz like that. It's exactly what football's all about." The match also received excellent media coverage, boosting the profile of the club and its supporters. The Daily Telegraph noted the impressive debut in the stands by the RBB, whilst The Sydney Morning Herald described the RBB as the "noisy bunch on the northern hill". A large crowd of over 3,500 people had turned out for the game and there was a clear sense that something special was being built.

Announcement of home ground, shirt sponsor, away playing strip and season aspirations

On Thursday the 26th of July 2012 a major announcement was held at Parramatta Stadium, attended by politicians including NSW State Sports Minister Graham Annersley, football representatives and the media. Lyall Gorman announced that Parramatta Stadium had been locked in to host all of the club's home games. The 5 year stadium deal was said to be financially one of the best deals in the A-league. This news was met with widespread appreciation from the fans who had lobbied hard for the club to have a single home ground and to avoid playing any games at ANZ Stadium



Parramatta Stadium

at Homebush Bay. No fewer than seven NSL grand finals had previously been played at Parramatta Stadium. Its place in football history couldn't be questioned. Parramatta Stadium was owned by the NSW State government.

The Sydney Olympic Park Authority had been strongly lobbying the club to base its training facilities at Homebush Bay and play 2-3 games at ANZ Stadium (Stadium Australia), with attractive financial incentives. However, Lyall Gorman held a strong view that Homebush Bay was not west enough and did not suit the identity and culture of the club. As the hub of the greater Western Sydney region, Parramatta was seen as ideal. Gorman knew the fans were opposed to ANZ Stadium and he had made the gutsy decision to avoid it. His priority was to follow a long term vision and define the club brand. The only game that would move away from Parramatta Stadium in the Wanderers' inaugural season would be the one "community round" game scheduled to be held at Campbelltown Stadium, which was a neutral game in addition to the 13 home games to be played at Parramatta.

The deal meant that Parramatta Stadium would have permanent tenants throughout the year, where the Parramatta Eels rugby league club would use the facility during the winter months and the Wanderers would use the stadium in the summer months. This also meant there was a greater potential for the stadium to be upgraded and expanded to 30,000 seats as per a masterplan that had already been prepared for the facility. A giant TV screen was soon installed at the southern end largely because of the Wanderers deal for the use of the stadium.



NRMA Insurance sponsorship

At the same media conference Lyall Gorman announced a major shirtfront and naming rights sponsorship deal with NRMA Insurance. The sponsorship deal was regarded as the best in the A-league and would inject over \$2m to the club over 3 years. Andy Cornish of NRMA Insurance was on hand to hail the announcement and made known the company's pride to be associated with the Wanderers.

The club's away strip was also officially launched. The unique hoop-styled jersey was retained. The away strip consisted of a red and white hooped jersey, black shorts and white socks. Players modelled the away kit in front of the media.



**Back row: Aaron Mooy, Michael Beauchamp, Mark Bridge and Tarek Elrich
Front row: Tony Popovic, Graham Annersley, Lyall Gorman and Andy Cornish**

The final announcement made was that Wanderers memberships would be available to purchase on Wednesday the 1st of August 2012. Over 5,500 expressions of interest had been received online through the club website. The club would be targeting around 7,000 memberships and a season average crowd of over 10,000 people.

The club had achieved a mountain of off-field work since the announcement of the new club on the 4th of April 2012. Much of this work had been undertaken by FFA staff, as minimal club staff had yet been appointed. The recruitment of staff was gradually taking place and soon the club would be adequately skilled and resourced. Lyall Gorman was known to be putting in 100-hour weeks, indicating his passion to make the club a success.



Tarek Elrich in the away kit

Trifiro and D'Apuzzo announced as signings



Jason Trifiro

Adam D'Apuzzo

On the 29th and 30th of July, Western Sydney born and raised player Jason Trifiro, and Adam D'Apuzzo, who also hailed from Western Sydney, were announced as new signings to the club. Trifiro was a midfielder, then playing in the Victorian Premier League, whilst D'Apuzzo, a defender, had previously played for the Newcastle Jets in the A-league.

Club memberships go on sale

Club memberships went on sale at 1pm on Wednesday the 1st of August 2012 through the club's website. The membership packages included reserved seating options, non-reserved seating options and non-ticketed options and were all generally good value. Adult memberships ranged from between \$80 and \$312 for various options. Concession and family membership options were also available.

Of the membership benefits included, such as access to all 13 home games, members would also be given the right to nominate 2 club board members, thereby having a tangible say in the running of the club. Other benefits included a 10% discount on merchandise, a 10% discount on stadium food/beverages, a 10% discount on additional match-day tickets, free public transport to home games, access to post-match events, and free entry to W-league and National Youth League games.

The club also acknowledged the importance of active support, designating 3 bays (approximately 1,100 seats) at the northern end of Parramatta Stadium for active support fan memberships, naming this area the Red and Black Bloc on the stadium seating plan which was a great gesture to the RBB. The membership brochure also stated clearly that fans in the active area would likely be required to participate in active supporter activities and would stand during the match.

Impressively, within 24 hours it was reported that around 1,000 club memberships had already been sold. There was a strong attraction to becoming a Foundation Member of the club.

Second pre-season game against Blacktown Spartans

On Wednesday evening the 1st of August the Wanderers played their 2nd pre-season game against NSW Premier League club, Blacktown Spartans at the athletics centre at Blacktown International Sportspark, Rooty Hill. The match was free admission. Despite the bitterly cold weather, an impressive crowd of 4,116 fans attended to see the Wanderers win 2-0 with goals to Mark Bridge and Ricky Zucco (trialist). The RBB was in fine voice and continued to develop various chants and create a great atmosphere inside the small stadium.



Mark Bridge

Caira, Tyson and Minniecon announced as signings



On the 2nd of August it was announced that Reece Caira from the NSW Central Coast and goalkeeper Jerrod Tyson, a Queenslander, had been signed to the club. Tahj Minniecon, another Queenslander, was confirmed as a Wanderers signing on the 8th of August. Caira was a defender who had been released by Aston Villa in England,

whilst Tyson was a goalkeeper who had previously played for Gold Coast United in the A-league. Minniecon was a striker who had played previously for Brisbane Roar and Gold Coast United in the A-league.

In total, 14 players had by now been signed to the club.

Third pre-season game against Blacktown City

The Wanderers played their 3rd pre-season game against NSW Premier League club, Blacktown City at Gabbie Stadium, Seven Hills on Wednesday evening the 8th of August. Admission to the game was \$5 and another impressive crowd of 3,472 people attended - the biggest crowd to have been to the ground since the 1980s during the NSL. The Wanderers were winning the local hearts and minds and went on to run out winners 2-0 with both goals to Labinot Haliti. The RBB was again in fine voice and was well-represented in the stands.



Labinot Haliti

Kresinger and Poljak announced as signings



On the 13th of August it was announced that Croatians Dino Kresinger and Mateo Poljak had been signed to the Wanderers. They made up the first of the foreign players to be signed to the club. Kresinger, a striker, and Poljak, a midfielder, were experienced players from the Croatian national league.

Campbelltown fiasco

Unsettling scenes occurred on the evening of the 14th of August at a pre-season game between Sydney FC and Macarthur Rams at Campbelltown Stadium, where a brawl was reported to have occurred between Sydney FC fans and a small group of fans claiming to support the Wanderers after a flare had been thrown. As a result of the brawl, one man was left unconscious and a 6 year old boy was grazed by a projectile.

Despite the acts of a very small minority of people, the incident generated widespread media attention and sustained negative publicity towards the Wanderers, the RBB and the national competition. The CEO's of Sydney FC and the Wanderers were outraged by the incident, holding a joint press conference where they vowed to eradicate that type of behaviour by way of a zero tolerance policy. The RBB denied any involvement and stated that it was strongly opposed to such behaviour. The overwhelming majority of Wanderers fans were also vocal in their opposition to the scenes which had been witnessed.

RBB social night 17/8/2012

An RBB social night was held on Friday night the 17th of August at the Woolpack Hotel. Over 50 fans attended the gathering which involved chant practice. It was an enjoyable evening where the fans mingled and shared each other's enthusiasm to be loud and proud at the upcoming pre-season game against Sydney United.

Polenz announced as signing

On the 21st of August Jérôme Polenz, a defender/midfielder signed with the Wanderers. The German was the third foreigner added to the squad and had previously played in the German national league.



Fourth pre-season game against Sydney United

The 4th Wanderers pre-season game was played against NSW Premier League club, Sydney United, at Edensor Park on Wednesday evening the 22rd of August. Tony Popovic was returning to his old club. Tickets to the game cost \$15 for adults and \$10 for concessions, and an official crowd of 3,234 (possibly an exaggerated figure) turned out.



Sydney United was a former powerhouse of the NSL and would provide a stern test. In the first half, Sydney United opened the scoring through Stamatellis. Mark Bridge equalised early in the second half, however United would score again late in the game through Vidaic after a penalty had been awarded. United held on to run out winners 2-1, resulting in the first ever loss by the Wanderers.

Despite all the negative media attention to the club and its fans over the previous week, the RBB was louder, prouder, bigger than ever and was impeccably well-behaved. A large contingent of police were present to watch over the game. The Sydney United supporters group was ejected from their bay early in the first half

after a firecracker was let off by a Sydney United supporter. Police issued a heavy-handed response, charging the group with batons, pepper spray and police dogs. This incident again generated intense negative media coverage to the game of football.



The Red and Black Bloc at Sydney United

The incidents of crowd trouble at Campbelltown and Edensor Park, where a total of 3 people had been arrested, caused a major disruption to the growing momentum which the Wanderers had been building. Various media outlets appeared to be taking part in an orchestrated attack on the game of football, on the Wanderers and on the RBB. The growing profile and popularity of the club took a major hit and likely caused a slowing in membership sales, sponsor interest and public enthusiasm.

The club and its supporters would need to slowly claw back their reputations. The club also amended the name of the active support area in the club's stadium seating plan due to the negativity being associated with the "Red and Black Bloc" name. From now on the active area would simply be known as the "Red and Black" active area. The one positive to come out of this was that it brought the fans closer together and made their resolve stronger than ever. Suggestions to change the name of the supporter group were dismissed. The fans had themselves chosen the RBB name and were proud of it.

Player visits to community drive membership sales

On the weekend of the 25th and 26th of August the Wanderers players attended a number of community and grassroots football events across Western Sydney. These efforts helped boost membership sales and helped the club maintain and strengthen the bond that it was developing with the local community. It was reported that around 400 memberships were sold over that weekend alone.



Players visit the community

Training camp in Brisbane and fifth pre-season game against Wynnum Wolves



Aaron Mooy

On Sunday the 26th of August the squad flew to Brisbane in Queensland for a training camp, where the players were put through a number of training sessions and developed more as a tight knit unit.

Then on Tuesday evening the 28th of August the team took on Brisbane Premier League club, Wynnum Wolves at Carmichael Park, Tingalpa, Queensland in their 5th pre-season game. Entry to the game was \$2. In a match that consisted of 3x 30 minute stanzas, the Wanderers ran out winners 1-0 in front of around 3,000 people. Mark Bridge scored the only goal of the game.

Sixth pre-season game against Melbourne Heart

The squad then travelled to Lismore in northern New South Wales to take on A-league side Melbourne Heart in their 6th pre-season game at Oakes Oval on Friday evening the 31st of August. In their first ever game against A-league opposition the match ended 0-0 after 90 minutes, which was then followed by a penalty shoot-out which ended 5-3 in favour of Melbourne Heart. Admission to the game was \$10 and a crowd of 3,300 attended.



Michael Beauchamp

Merchandise becomes available

In early September limited numbers of official club merchandise items such as scarfs and beanies were available for sale in some Sydney sports stores. On the 5th of September the club's official online store opened with a limited variety of merchandise items available for sale. The club's jersey would not be available until early October but could be pre-ordered.

Members would also be provided with the opportunity to purchase foundation member-only scarfs which would not be delivered until later in the year. Around this time the Red and Black Bloc also began to distribute the first of its own RBB merchandise.

RBB social night 7/9/2012

On Friday night the 7th of September the RBB held another social night at the Woolpack Hotel, where over 50 fans attended. The evening provided the opportunity for chant practice and to also meet with the club's fan engagement manager, Shaun Mielekamp, who was keen to discuss the support of the club.

Seventh pre-season game against Parramatta FC



The Wanderers played their 7th pre-season game against NSW Premier League club, Parramatta FC on Sunday evening the 9th of September at Parramatta Stadium. It was the first ever game for the Wanderers at Parramatta Stadium and the team ran out winners 1-0, with Dino Kresinger scoring his first goal for the club. Admission was \$7 and a crowd of 1,063 attended. The crowd was impeccably well-behaved and the RBB was in full voice, impressive in their debut at their home arena.

The pre-match activities also included the RBB's first march from the Woolpack Hotel to the stadium along Church Street through the heart of Parramatta, which grabbed the attention of the locals and was a memorable experience for all who took part.

Club ensures inaugural Sydney Derby to remain at Parramatta Stadium

In early September the Wanderers' cross city rival, Sydney FC, signed Italian and Juventus legend Alessandro Del Piero, sparking massive public interest in the club and the A-league, and driving increased club membership sales. It was expected that Sydney FC's game attendances would see a major increase in the upcoming season, leading to speculation that the inaugural Sydney Derby, to be held in round 3 of the upcoming A-league season, would be moved from Parramatta Stadium to ANZ Stadium at Homebush Bay so as to accommodate a larger crowd.

Despite calls from some sections of the media to move the game, Lyall Gorman stuck to his guns, releasing a statement on the 11th of September that the Sydney Derby would remain at Parramatta. He stated that the Western Sydney community had been consulted during the fan forums and that the overwhelming preference was for Parramatta Stadium to be the Wanderers home ground. He also spoke of the need to build a fantastic atmosphere inside the stadium and that Parramatta Stadium was perfect for this.

Gorman understood that tickets to the Sydney Derby at Parramatta Stadium would be in high demand and that some fans would miss out, but the club's commitment to its members would come first. He then encouraged fans to become members so as to guarantee a seat at the first Sydney Derby.

Gorman was praised for his vision and efforts in protecting the culture and values of the club. He had put the most valuable thing first – the wishes of the fans.

La Rocca and Hersi announced as signings



On the 11th of September the Wanderers announced the signings of two more foreign imports, being Italian Iacopo La Rocca and Dutchman Youssouf Hersi. La Rocca, a defender, had previously played in the Italian and Swiss national leagues, whilst Hersi, a midfielder, had played previously in the Netherlands.

The number of foreign players signed to the Wanderers now totalled 5 with the addition of La Rocca and Hersi.

Club members gain priority access to additional match tickets

By the 12th of September around 2,000 club memberships had been sold. On this day all members were provided with the opportunity to purchase additional tickets to all Wanderers home games prior to wider public release a little over a week later on the 21st of September.

The price of adult tickets to Wanderers home A-league games for public sale ranged from \$20 to \$32 for adults in various categories. Concession and family ticket options were also available. Club members would receive a 10% discount on ticket prices.

Eighth pre-season game against Newcastle Jets

The Wanderers took on A-league side Newcastle Jets in their 8th pre-season game at Wanderers Oval, Broadmeadow on Saturday afternoon the 15th of September. The match was open to Jets and Wanderers members only and attracted a crowd of 3,000. The feisty match ended 1-1, with a first half strike by Newcastle's Neville being cancelled out by Wanderers striker Dino Kresinger in the second half.



W-League draw, National Youth League draw and home stadiums announced

The W-League season draw was released on the 18th of September, where Campbelltown Stadium was confirmed as the home ground for the Wanderers W-League team. On the 20th of September the National Youth League season draw was released, where Campbelltown Stadium and Cook Park in St Marys were confirmed as the home grounds for the Wanderers' National Youth League team.

Club considers pursuit of marquee player

With significant and ongoing media interest in the arrival of Alessandro Del Piero to Sydney FC, who had been signed to the club for \$2 million a season, this demonstrated the potential for the recruitment of a high profile player to boost club profile, drive membership sales and increase public interest in the club. The Wanderers renewed their interest in recruiting a high profile player to help boost the club on and off the field in its inaugural season.

Lyll Gorman spoke on the topic of marquee players and how they fit with the culture and values of the club. In a veiled dig at Sydney FC, he said that the appeal of the Wanderers would never be built around one player. He applauded Sydney's efforts to secure the services of Del Piero, however he would ensure that the Wanderers would have commitment to community engagement at its core. This didn't necessarily imply that a marquee player would not be part of the Wanderers culture. A marquee player would be considered by the Wanderers. The club would maintain its community reach, but with a "big club" mentality, seeking to be the biggest club in Australia.

Gorman stressed that the Wanderers would not be totally relying on a marquee player, on or off the field. He stated that: "if we isolate it to just that, we'll make no impact and our relationships - whether it's with the corporate, with government or our fans - will rely solely on winning or losing on the park. That is a fundamental trap many professional sporting clubs fall into."

A marquee player would need to tick all the right boxes to ensure that the player fit with the vision and values of the club. As head coach, Tony Popovic would be given the final decision on the recruitment of any player.

Club permitted to sign an additional 2 foreigners

It was revealed that the Wanderers had been allowed special dispensation by the FFA to sign two foreign players in addition to the maximum 5 permitted for A-league clubs, reported to be for a 2-year period. The special ruling was introduced to provide the club with additional assistance in its inaugural season. There was a low availability of Australian players of a suitable quality and the club had only a few months to recruit an entire squad. It was seen that providing additional places for foreigners would allow the Wanderers to form a suitably-skilled squad. Some clubs had voiced their opposition to the ruling, however the ruling was endorsed by the Joint A-league Strategic Committee.

German Michael Ballack in talks with Wanderers

Media reports on the 19th of September suggested that the club was in discussions with German legend, Michael Ballack. The fans were excited. The story made big headlines in the mainstream media over the period of a week where a number of conflicting reports suggested the deal was on then off. Approaches from the former Bayern Munich and Chelsea star would eventually be turned down by the Wanderers due to concerns over Ballack's fitness, his high wage demands and how the player would fit with Tony Popovic's tactical plans for the team. Instead, there were further reports that Japanese legend, Shinji Ono and Argentine legend Juan Román Riquelme were in discussions with the club. Days later Ballack would officially announce his retirement from the game. The club had made the correct decision not to sign him.



**Michael Beauchamp
named captain**

Michael Beauchamp named inaugural team captain

On Friday the 21st of September, Michael Beauchamp was named as inaugural Wanderers captain for the upcoming A-league season. The Western Sydney product was delighted with the honour and said he took great pride in representing the Western Sydney community. Tarek Elrich was named vice-captain.

Japanese star Shinji Ono in talks with Wanderers

Media reports on the 22nd of September suggested that the Wanderers were in detailed discussions with Japanese legend, Shinji Ono. Ono was one of the most famous players in Asian football and had played 56 times for his country, which included 3 World Cup campaigns. His club career had seen him play for Sanfrecce Hiroshima and Urawa Red Diamonds in Japan, as well as with Feyenoord in the Netherlands. Ono was now looking to move to the Wanderers from J-League side, Shimizu S-Pulse. Known as Tensai (Japanese for "Genius") in his homeland, Popovic was well aware of his playing abilities. Ono was also fit and ready to slot into the squad.

Ninth pre-season game against Wellington Phoenix

The Wanderers flew to New Zealand to play Wellington Phoenix in their 9th pre-season game on Sunday afternoon the 23rd of September at AMI Stadium, Christchurch. The match ended in a 1-1 draw in front of around 6,500 people. Aaron Mooy's first half strike was cancelled out by Phoenix player Brockie in the second half.



**Nikolai
Topor-Stanley**

Membership cards begin arriving to members

On Monday the 24th of September membership cards and information began arriving in the mail for persons who had purchased memberships.

Tenth and final pre-season game against Bankstown City Lions



Wanderers v Bankstown City Lions

The Wanderers played their 10th and final pre-season game against Bankstown City Lions at Jensen Park, Sefton on Thursday evening the 27th of September. Admission was \$10 and a crowd of around 2,000 turned out to see the Wanderers run out winners 3-0. The Wanderers goal scorers were Labinot Haliti, Jason Trifiro and Nicholas Olsen (youth league squad). The RBB was again loud and had provided support throughout the game. It had established a variety of songs and chants during pre-season and was now ready for season kickoff.

It had been a long pre-season and now finally the team could turn its focus to round 1 of the A-league season. The Wanderers pre-season had generally gone well. With 10 games under their belt the squad had gelled together nicely. Popovic was proud of his players and stated that they deserved a lot of credit for their hard work.

Shinji Ono signs with Wanderers

On Friday the 28th of September it was officially announced that Japanese midfielder Shinji Ono had signed to the club as a marquee player on a minimum one-year deal for over \$500,000 a season with an option to extend this to 2 years. The Asian Champions League winner and former Asian footballer of the year would be coming to the Wanderers. The fans reacted positively to the signing, particularly because of Ono's fitness and that he looked suitable to integrate into Popovic's tactical plans for the team.



Shinji Ono

Away strip available in stores

The Wanderers away jerseys were finally available for purchase for the first time in many Sydney sports stores on Friday the 28th of September.

RBB inaugural tifo banner workshop day and social

On Saturday the 29th of September the Red and Black Bloc held a workshop and social gathering in a suburban park in Smithfield where the tifo banner was created for the inaugural A-league game for the club. It was a historic and enjoyable day for all persons involved.

Shinji Ono arrives at Sydney Airport



Shinji Ono arrives in Sydney

Shinji Ono flew into Sydney Airport from Tokyo around 7am on Monday the 1st of October (a public holiday) and was greeted by a vocal group of about 10 Wanderers fans who chanted his name, raising a big smile from the Japanese legend who had not expected the vocal welcome. Ono was met by Lyall Gorman, other club staff and a large contingent of Australian and Japanese media, to whom he gave a short press conference inside the airport terminal. Ono was impressed by the reception and told the media that he would give all his energy to the team and looked forward to the round 3 derby against Alessandro Del Piero and Sydney FC.

Ono was given a Wanderers scarf to wear by Wanderers General Manager of Football Operations, John Tsatsimas, and was presented with his first Wanderers jersey by Wanderers CEO Lyall Gorman. He then posed for photos with the Wanderers fans and signed autographs. Ono's arrival generated a lot of media interest and made headlines on the evening TV news and in the major newspapers.



Ono with his Wanderers jersey



Ono is greeted by the fans

Lyall Gorman would go on to tell the media that with the signing of Shinji Ono the club

was prioritising work ethic before star power. Careful investigation had been made into Ono's fitness, as well as his character. The club would be built on a team rather than any individual. That would be the club's approach to pursuing marquee players. Gorman said that Ono would be the best value marquee player in the competition. He

was fit, ready to integrate with the Wanderers squad and also had the following of a large Asian fan base. Ono left the airport and went straight to the training field to meet his team mates, undertake a medical and take part in a 1 hour training session with the squad.

Home strip officially launched and available in stores

In the afternoon of Monday the 1st of October the Wanderers home jersey was officially launched at the Penrith Westfield Nike store, where players Tarek Elrich, Kwabena Appiah-Kubi, Nikolai Topor-Stanley, Labinot Haliti, Tahj Minniecon and Jerrad Tyson met with about 40-50 fans and took part in a question and answer session. The red and black hooped jersey was well-received by the fans, especially because of the use of an embodied club logo on the shirt front and the addition of a smaller 'WSWFC' logo on the back of the neck. The shirts were of excellent quality and well worth the wait. There was a rush to purchase the home jersey across all Sydney sports stores and most shops quickly sold out.



Players at the home kit launch

THE 2012/2013 SEASON BEGINS

A-league season launch

On Tuesday the 2nd of October 2012 the 2012/2013 A-league season (season 8) was officially launched with simultaneous events in Sydney and Melbourne. The Sydney launch was held at Parramatta Stadium, the home of the A-league's newest club, the Western Sydney Wanderers FC. The launch was attended by a large contingent of media, as well as players and coaches from A-league clubs. For the first time the "Big Three" recent marquee signings to the league came together, being Italian superstar Alessandro Del Piero of Sydney FC, English international Emile Heskey of Newcastle Jets, and Shinji Ono from the Wanderers. These signings were generating big headlines for the league and for their clubs. The season would consist of a 27-round home and away season, culminating in a 3-week finals series in April 2013.



Shinji Ono, Alessandro Del Piero and Emile Heskey

The excitement and anticipation of the upcoming A-league season was at a level comparable to the inaugural season of the A-league in 2005. This was in part due to the inclusion of a team from Western Sydney. FFA CEO Ben Buckley stated that: "Yes, we've introduced new clubs before, but none with the promise to change our landscape in the way we believe the Western Sydney Wanderers will do in the game's heartland".

Buckley announced that Hyundai had extended its sponsorship of the competition until at least 2016. It was also anticipated that a new TV deal would be completed in the coming weeks which would provide better financial security to A-league clubs. The new TV deal would begin in mid-2013. Fox Sports would be the primary A-league broadcaster and for the first time the TV deal would include a free-to-air component with SBS television, where one free-to-air A-league game would be broadcast every round. The introduction of a Western Sydney team into the A-league was an important selling point in broadcast negotiations. With the addition of a 2nd Sydney team and the coming of the Sydney Derby, there was even greater interest around the A-league in Sydney. It was also announced later that a national radio broadcast deal had been struck with ABC Radio, offering greater exposure and access to the A-League across Australia.

Buckley would soon be handing over control as FFA CEO to former National Rugby League CEO David Gallop, and there was much to be excited about for the future of the competition.

There was an increased effort to promote the competition in the week leading up to kickoff, resulting in greater media interest and coverage. Advertising of the A-league season had been limited up until this point. Fans were encouraged to attend games and buy memberships. The FFA led the way with its "We Are Football" campaign. It was anticipated that the record for the total crowd for one A-league round would be beaten on the first weekend of the upcoming season.

Gibbs signs to Wanderers

On the 3rd of October Joey Gibbs became the 21st player officially signed to the Wanderers. As a trialist, Gibbs had previously scored 4 goals for the club in its first ever game against Nepean FC in July. The Central Coast product and former Sydney FC player was now officially a signed player for the Wanderers after months of effort pushing for a contract.



Joey Gibbs

Membership packs begin arriving to members

In the week leading up to the start of the season, membership packs also began arriving in the mail, such as member mini-scarfs, foundation member caps, key rings etc for all members who purchased memberships early on. People who purchased memberships later were unable to receive their cards and packs until after the season had commenced.

Wanderers club season launch and announcement of squads, short sponsor, training centre and club board

On Thursday the 4th of October the club held a three-phase season launch. The launch began around midday with a club stall being set up in Parramatta's Church Street Mall, where upcoming games and memberships were promoted.

The next phase of the day was held in the afternoon at Prince Alfred Park, Parramatta where the A-league, W-League and National Youth League squads were officially unveiled on stage in front of hundreds of fans. Ian "Dicko" Dickson, the club's ambassador, hosted the event and conducted interviews on stage with the coaches and some players of



The club season launch at Prince Alfred Park

the three squads. The Parramatta City Council Lord Mayor, John Chedid, also made a speech. The event had a truly community feel and provided opportunities for the club to sell memberships, match tickets and merchandise. Westfield shopping centres was also announced as the shorts sponsor for the Wanderers for the next 2 seasons. Following the official presentations, the players and staff mingled with the fans, posing for photographs and signing autographs.

The Wanderers A-league squad was officially announced as follows:

WESTERN SYDNEY WANDERERS FC A-LEAGUE SQUAD 2012/2013 SEASON				
Player Name	Position	Squad Number	Nationality	Age
Ante Covic	Goalkeeper	1	Australian	37
Jerrad Tyson	Goalkeeper	20	Australian	23
Shannon Cole	Defender	2	Australian	28
Iacopo La Rocca	Defender	18	Italian	28
Adam D'Apuzzo	Defender	3	Australian	25
Jerome Polenz	Defender	6	German	25
Reece Caira	Defender	15	Australian	19
Tarek Elrich	Defender	11	Australian	25
Nikolai Topor-Stanley	Defender	4	Australian	27
Michael Beauchamp	Defender	5	Australian	31
Aaron Mooy	Midfielder	10	Australian	22
Shinji Ono	Midfielder	21	Japanese	33
Jason Trifiro	Midfielder	23	Australian	24
Mateo Poljak	Midfielder	8	Croatian	23
Youssef Hersi	Midfielder	17	Dutch	30
Tahj Minniecon	Forward	12	Australian	23
Mark Bridge	Forward	19	Australian	26
Labinot Haliti	Forward	7	Australian	26
Kwabena Appiah-Kubi	Forward	14	Australian	20
Dino Kresinger	Forward	9	Croatian	30
Joey Gibbs	Forward	13	Australian	20

The Wanderers W-League season would begin on the 20th of October, whilst the Wanderers National Youth League season would begin on the 21st of October.

The final stage of the Wanderers season launch took place in the evening at Parramatta's Riverside Theatre. The VIP event was invitation-only and was attended by politicians, sponsors, stakeholders, media, players and staff associated with the club. Various people gave speeches, including FFA Chairman Frank Lowy, Wanderers CEO Lyall Gorman, NSW State Sports Minister Graham Annersley and Andy Cornish of the NRMA on an evening hosted by Ian "Dicko" Dickson. Lowy and Gorman paid tribute to the work done by those who had made the club a reality on the eve of its first-ever A-League match.

It was announced that Blacktown International Sportspark would remain as the team's training and administration centre for the foreseeable future and that the club staff would soon be moving into the venue after an office refurbishment had been completed. The facility was owned by Blacktown City Council. The club would be truly for the West. The team would train at Blacktown, play games at Parramatta, its W-League team would play at Campbelltown, whilst the Youth team would play at St Marys.



Club season launch at the Riverside Theatre

The club's players and community engagement team has been immersing themselves in the community and had reached over 100,000 people at 55 events across Western Sydney, which had translated into membership sales and huge interest in the Wanderers. Since the birth of the Wanderers only months earlier, nearly 3,000 members had come on board, and the club had seen over 100 School Ambassadors and nearly 70 volunteers join its respective programs.

Another highlight included the official naming of the inaugural 5-man Wanderers board, which would consist of Lyall Gorman, Benjamin Chow, Warren Mundine, Paul Lederer and Elliott Rusanow. Benjamin Chow was a leader of the Australian Chinese community with extensive business, community and political links. Warren Mundine was a high-profile advocate of Indigenous employment with a long career in corporate, community and political affairs. Paul Lederer was a prominent businessman with major manufacturing interests in western Sydney. Elliott Rusanow was a senior corporate finance executive. It was planned that in 2013 steps would be taken to allow members to nominate two board members.

As FFA Chairman and also billionaire co-founder of the Westfield Group, Frank Lowy would ensure that the Wanderers were financially supported through the short sponsorship announced with Westfield shopping centres. It was also no surprise that two appointed board members, Paul Lederer and Elliot Rusanow, were close associates of Frank Lowy.

All associated with the club reflected on how much had been achieved in such a short timeframe. CEO Lyall Gorman reflected on a conversation he had with FFA Chairman Frank Lowy when the club was announced back in April. Gorman had asked Lowy how everything could be achieved in such a short timeframe in time for the start of the season. Lowy's answer was to "double the shifts". Gorman and many others in the club had done just that and had put together a club that would be strong on and off the field.

Build up to inaugural A-league game

The build-up continued to the Wanderers' inaugural A-league game. There were very good vibes surrounding the club and the league. Anticipation and excitement was ever-present. In just 186 days the club and an impressive fan base had been built from scratch. The club had defied the sceptics and the fans were ready to give the team all their support. A lot of good will had been built up between the

club and the fans. Community engagement had achieved so much, and the fans, being the most important asset, were right behind the club. Lyall Gorman anticipated a crowd of 10-12,000 to attend the Wanderers' first game.

It was reported that 3,000 club memberships had been sold. Membership sales had been slow, however they were now picking up as the season was beginning. Despite the slow sales, the club could still boast having more members than some other A-league clubs. Membership of WestSydneyFootball.com had also reached 800 members, highlighting the growing online presence of Wanderers fans.

The Red and Black Bloc and Wanderers fans had provided strong support for the team during the pre-season, something that many A-league clubs didn't experience. The players and the club acknowledged this and thanked the fans for their wonderful efforts in the lead up to season kickoff.

The Wanderers A-League squad included a number of experienced A-League players who had been released by their previous clubs. There were also a number of talented foreigners as well as promising young Australian talent. Many commentators wrote the team off as a bunch of A-League rejects, unwanted by their former clubs, who were likely to finish at the bottom of the table, or at best mid-table. Popovic was not affected by such comments and stated that the team would be competitive. He had carefully selected his players and staff and was sure that they would deliver respectable results on the field.

Popovic had in fact done well to form the squad under the tight timeframe involved. He had also been very successful in convincing players to join the new club despite the element of unknown and the risk involved. Squads at other clubs in the competition had the benefit of having already played together for entire seasons, whilst Popovic had only a few months to build and gel his squad from scratch. Shinji Ono, having arrived in Australia earlier that week, was also unlikely to start in the Wanderers' first game.

A-league Round 1: Wanderers inaugural A-league game v Central Coast Mariners at Parramatta Stadium 6/10/2012

On Saturday the 6th of October 2012 Western Sydney Wanderers FC played its inaugural A-league game at Parramatta Stadium, taking on the Central Coast Mariners. The club's first ever competitive match was an historic occasion that had been looked forward to by so many people for so long. Finally the moment had arrived. Commenting on the occasion, football legend Mark Bosnich would say: "It's very exciting. The only thing I can liken it to is a team getting promoted from a division below. It's such a historic area for Australian football, it is great to see..."

With Parramatta Stadium being located so close to the Parramatta city centre, the CBD was buzzing before the game with thousands of fans dressed in red and black, filling the streets, restaurants and pubs. There was excitement in the air and a genuine community feel.

The evening at Parramatta Stadium began when all Wanderers members were invited onto the field to be acknowledged prior to the game. This was a memorable event enjoyed by thousands of members who were paraded around the field.

Parramatta Stadium had been converted to a true home for the Wanderers. The club name was proudly installed on the outside of the stadium, along with club flags and signage. Inside the stadium, signs displaying the message "Welcome to Wanderland" had been installed on both the main grandstands, a statement that this was the Wanderers' home and that they had arrived.



Wanderers members on the field



Wanderers fans at the Woolpack Hotel

The Red and Black Bloc gathered at the Woolpack Hotel in the Parramatta CBD prior to the game, which was packed with hundreds of Wanderers fans (both RBB and non-RBB) who sung and socialised, creating an intense pre-game atmosphere enjoyed by all.

Then the supporter's march to Parramatta Stadium commenced, taking a route via Church Street, through the buzzing restaurant precinct of the Parramatta CBD. The march was a truly wonderful occasion, complete with singing and chanting that

continued non-stop all the way to the stadium. Around 600 fans took part, causing great excitement, colour and atmosphere, catching the attention of onlookers who were amazed at the scene they were witnessing. Football had truly arrived in Parramatta. As the march continued north out of the restaurant precinct, the fans stopped at Lennox Bridge and then again in Prince Alfred Park to take part in signing and chants before moving onwards to the stadium. The march was good-natured, took place off the road, was without incident and was planned to be a tradition before each home game.



Frank Lowy and Lyall Gorman



Tony Popovic

At Parramatta Stadium the game was preceded by a presentation ceremony involving FFA Chairman Frank Lowy, Wanderers Chief Executive Lyall Gorman, as well as a fireworks display. Ian 'Dicko' Dickson hosted the pre-game ceremony and conducted interviews on the field.

The team line-ups were announced, the Wanderers starting XI being: Ante Covic, Adam D'Apuzzo, Nikolai Topor-Stanley, Michael Beauchamp, Jérôme Polenz, Mateo Poljak, Aaron Mooy,

Mark Bridge, Labinot Haliti, Dino Kresinger and Youssouf Hersi. Shinjo Ono, Shannon Cole, Kwabena Appiah-Kubi and Jerrad Tyson were named on the bench. The substitutions used were Kwabena Appiah-Kubi (Youssouf Hersi 59'), Shinji Ono (Labinot Haliti 60'), and Shannon Cole (Mateo Poljak 78').



The Wanderers starting XI for the club's first ever A-league game

At 7:45pm the teams took to the field, with the Wanderers players wearing their red and black hooped jerseys for the first time. At the northern end of the stadium, the Red and Black Bloc unfurled a large tifo which was draped over bay 56, the banner simply read: "Football Comes Home". The message summed up the occasion perfectly. Finally, the A-league was entering the home of football in Australia and the make-up of the national competition was now complete.



'Football Comes Home' tifo banner



Mark Bridge

The match kicked off and was full of action from start to finish. The Wanderers began the game cautiously but soon grew into the contest, being rock solid at the back and quick on the counter. Both teams were evenly matched and the Wanderers impressed against last season's A-league Premiers. Central Coast had the bulk of the possession however the Wanderers had the better of the chances and were unlucky not to have scored, with Bridge and Haliti squandering some excellent opportunities. Shinji Ono entered the game in the second half to a loud greeting from the crowd and immediately impressed with a number of skilful touches and clever passing, drawing a song from the RBB. Aaron Mooy also impressed in midfield with good touches and distribution.



The crowd watches on

The teams played out an entertaining and absorbing 0-0 draw, seen as an excellent start to the Wanderers A-league journey. The crowd in the stadium gave a round of applause to the team at full time, showing their appreciation for the team's efforts and its fighting spirit. The club picked up its first point of the competition and the fans had much to look forward to for the season ahead.



Shinji Ono

Despite the wet weather that had been constant throughout the day, a respectable crowd of 10,458 fans attended the game, providing a good foundation for the club to build on. This crowd size was larger than the average crowd size of some other A-league clubs. Conditions were extremely wet and windy. Light rain opened the game, but conditions progressively grew worse. Lightning flashes could be seen in the distance and a rainstorm passed over the ground during the game with extremely heavy rainfall. The rain did not drive many fans away.



The Red and Black Bloc

Most of the crowd wore the team colours and were vocal and engaged the entire game. Commentators remarked that the crowd on hand was a true football crowd, educated, passionate, tribal and keen to stay until the final whistle. Merchandise stores at the ground sold out quickly - the fans were keen to wear the club colours and be suitably attired to support their team. A small contingent of Mariners fans also made the trip to Parramatta. The crowd at the game was indicative of the many faces of Western Sydney – people from a wide variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, all supporting the same team. This was special. Some fans were new to the A-league, whilst others had followed it already. For some this was their first club to support, whilst others had already supported clubs, whether it be in the A-league, in the former NSL, in state competitions, grassroots and around the world. The fans were a mix of all sorts.

The RBB was given significant all-round praise by the club, the fans and the media, who commented that the group were so impressive that it was as though they had been supporting the team for years. Packed with red and black colour, drums, flags and banners, the RBB numbered about 750 fans, with 400-450 core fans centred on bay 56 who were solid throughout the evening, putting all their energy into actively supporting the team. The RBB did not stop singing and chanting the entire game and provided noise, colour and atmosphere that made the game even more special to experience live.



The RBB in full voice



The RBB perform the 'Poznan'

The RBB had developed an array of chants and songs during the pre-season which were belted out, reverberating around the stadium. These included 'Who do we sing for?', 'Dale Cavese', 'Streets of Western Sydney', 'We are the terrace', 'Western Sydney we adore you', 'Come on you Wanderers', 'Wanderers score a goal', 'RBB Paranoia', '1,2,3 West', 'Westie scum', 'La Lambada' and 'Western Sydney Ole Ole Ole'. It was clear that there was already a dedicated core of fans that had been waiting for a team to support, representing the West. Around the 80th minute mark the RBB had performed the "Poznan", with the fans turning their backs to the game, with arms linked and jumping in unison. It looked amazing and was a first for the A-league.

Following the game's conclusion the players thanked the fans in the stadium and walked over to meet the RBB and acknowledge the group's great support. Tony Popovic would later say: "You could feel it before the game that there was a lot of passionate people here. They want to support a team; they want a team in the west." Players attended post match events and some conducted interviews.

There were no reports of crowd incidents. The fans were impeccably well-behaved. Parramatta Stadium was a perfect venue to contain and amplify the atmosphere and create a memorable experience for all who attended.



The players thank the fans

The game generated much media interest and boosted the profile of the club and the competition. There were many good vibes from the media and the Wanderers fans were given great respect. The club had performed well on and off the pitch. The Wanderers had arrived in the A-league and had taken their first step.

TV viewership of the game proved the demand for a second Sydney team in the competition, with the Wanderers game out rating Sydney FC's game which occurred that same day. It was also a record first round for the A-league. In round 1, 93,500 fans turned out to the five matches, beating the previous single-round aggregate record of 87,508 set in round 3 the previous season. TV viewership of games and the number of visits to the A-league official website had also experienced a significant increase compared to previous seasons. This impressive growth was expected to continue. In Sydney, the coverage of football in the media had significantly increased, a large part due to the presence of now two Sydney teams in the competition.

A-league Round 2: Wanderers first away game v Adelaide United at Adelaide 12/10/2012

The Wanderers' first A-league away game was played on Friday evening the 12th of October 2012 against Adelaide United at Hindmarsh Stadium, Adelaide. Adelaide had won its opening game of the A-league season and was in good form, having also narrowly losing its Asian Champions League quarter final a little over a week earlier.



Tony Popovic

At 7pm the Wanderers took to the field for the first time in their away strip of red and white hoops with white shorts. The Wanderers starting XI was as follows: Ante Covic, Adam D'Apuzzo, Nikolai Topor-Stanley, Michael Beauchamp, Jérôme Polenz, Mateo Poljak, Dino Kresinger, Aaron Mooy, Youssouf Hersi, Mark Bridge and Shinji Ono. Players named on the bench were: Labinot Haliti, Tarek Elrich, Iacopa La Rocca and Jerrad Tyson. Shinji Ono would get his first start for the Wanderers. The Wanderers substitutions used were Labinot Haliti (Youssouf Hersi 62') and Tarek Elrich (Mateo Poljak 78').

In front of a boisterous crowd of 8,950 fans, the first half saw both teams play out an even contest, characterised by skill errors from both sides in cold and windy



Jeronimo Neumann

conditions. Mateo Poljak came within inches of scoring but was prevented by the Adelaide goalkeeper. In the second half Adelaide were awarded a contentious penalty which was saved by Wanderers goalkeeper Ante Covic. However barely a minute later Adelaide's Argentine import Jeronimo Neumann was put through on goal after a Wanderers error and cleverly slotted home a goal in the 69th minute. It was the first goal conceded by the Wanderers in the A-league.

The Wanderers played well in response, attacking the Adelaide goal but could not find an equaliser, despite having some excellent chances towards the end of the game. Jeronimo's solitary goal would prove to be the winner. The Wanderers recorded their first A-league loss 0-1.



Shinji Ono

Shinji Ono played well and had developed an understanding with many of his teammates. However his inclusion in the starting team could not help the Wanderers find their first A-league goal or win. Coach Tony Popovic was disappointed with the result but took a lot of positives from the game, particularly the good passages of play by the team and how the players were gelling together and were developing an understanding with one another.

A small contingent of about 20 travelling Wanderers fans made the trip to Adelaide for the game, whilst many fans in Sydney watched the game on TV at the Woolpack Hotel.

W-league season begins: Round 1 - Wanderers v Adelaide United at Adelaide 20/10/2012

On Tuesday the 16th of October 2012 the W-league 2012/2013 season was officially launched at Sydney Harbour and Bondi Beach, where representatives of the competition's 8 teams took part in photoshoots and spoke with the media. The women's competition would be the biggest season yet with the addition of two rounds due to the inclusion of Western Sydney Wanderers into the competition. The 12-round Westfield W-league season would be broadcast by ABC Television.

Coach Stephen Roche had put together a competitive squad that included star Australian national team players Servet Uzunlar and Sarah Walsh. A number of players had moved away from Sydney FC to start off the new club. On Thursday the 18th of October the squad to play the team's first W-league game was announced, being: Elizabeth Durack, Samantha Spackman, Alexandra Huynh, Alesha Clifford, Olivia Kennedy, Jenna Kingsley, Vanessa Hart, Sarah Walsh (captain), Servet Uzunlar, Jessica Seaman, Catehrine Cannuli, Trudy Camilleri, Teigen Allen, Linda O'Neill, Alisha Bass, Georgia Rowntree and Rachael Soutar. Many in the squad hailed from Western Sydney.



Servet Uzunlar at the season launch

The W-league team's first W-league game was played away against Adelaide United at 1pm on Saturday the 20th of October 2012 at Burton Park, Adelaide. The starting XI for the game was: Olivia Kennedy, Alesha Clifford, Jenna Kingsley, Elizabeth Durack, Vanessa Hart, Servet Uzunlar, Linda O'Neill, Sarah Walsh, Samantha Spackman, Teigen Allen and Trudy Camilleri. The substitutes named were: Jessica Seaman, Georgia Rowntree, Alexandra Huynh and Alisha Bass.



Sarah Walsh

Wearing the away strip of red and white hoops with black shorts, the first half saw the Wanderers dominate possession. Servet Uzunlar became the first Wanderers player to score a goal for the W-league team in the 6th minute and then follow it up with another in the 21st minute. Soon after, Adelaide United was awarded a controversial penalty which was converted by Racheal Quigley in the 33rd minute. The Wanderers continued to dominate in the second half scoring again through Jenna Kingsley in the 54th minute. Up 3-1 with 13 minutes to play it looked as though the Wanderers were to record a win on debut, however Adelaide United player Sarah McLaughlin scored 3 goals in a period of 10 minutes (77', 80' and 88') to snatch a win for the home side. The Wanderers W-league team had lost its inaugural game 3-4.

Club developments following start of season

Following the start of the A-league season, the profile of the club continued to grow and more and more fans got on board. Media reporting of the club and the league was impressive and there was a great vibe around football in Australia.

Club merchandise was in high demand and was quickly being sold out in stores across Sydney. There was a surge in the purchase of Wanderers club memberships for the A-league season, with the club reporting prior to round 3 of the competition that 4,300 club memberships had now been sold. Membership of WestSydneyFootball.com had also grown to over 900 members prior to round 3, highlighting the growing online presence of the Wanderers community.

The players were happy. The squad continued to train and was gelling together nicely under the guidance of Tony Popovic and Ante Milicic. Shinji Ono continued to work at integrating with the squad and had so far impressed in his opening two games. The Japanese legend was modest at being compared to the likes of Del Piero or Heskey, saying that his priority was to just work hard, raise his fitness levels and to help make the team a success. He desired to gain respect from the Wanderers fans and to show Japanese players back in Japan that they can come to Australia and find success.

The players had all bought into Tony Popovic's plans. Popovic was known to be meticulous in his game preparation, and he was certainly getting the best out of his players. Mooy and Ono had impressed in midfield, whilst goalkeeper Covic and the team's defenders had already gained a reputation for being solid and extremely difficult to break down.

Build up to inaugural Sydney Derby

There was a prolonged and exciting build up to the inaugural Sydney Derby, which would be held on Saturday evening the 20th of October 2012 between Western Sydney Wanderers FC and Sydney FC at Parramatta Stadium. The week leading up to the game was heavily covered in the media and there was plenty of banter between players, staff and fans from both sides. The rivalry between the clubs had begun and would soon kick off for the first time on the field.

At the beginning of the week leading up to Sydney Derby the match was declared a sell-out. Everyone wanted to be part of the spectacle and be witness to the first ever meeting between the two sides. In an effort to further drive membership sales, the Wanderers club announced that a few hundred seats had been set aside to the game for persons wishing to purchase a Wanderers membership and guarantee a seat at the match. The strategy worked a number of additional memberships were taken up by fans.

The Wanderers squad was fully fit and was coming off a narrow loss to Adelaide United where the team had played well. Sydney FC was missing a number of first team players due to injury, particularly in defence, and there was significant pressure on the team to win, having lost its first 2 games of the season. Marquee players Alessandro Del Piero and Shinji Ono would square off in the encounter, adding further excitement to the meeting. There were also a number of Wanderers players who were former players of Sydney FC, adding spice to the rivalry.

Ante Covic spoke of the anticipation and excitement the players felt leading up to the game. The Wanderers goalkeeper had previously played for Melbourne Victory in the Melbourne Derbies and had been amazed at the heated tribal atmosphere he had witnessed at the games. Covic stated that "There's a different feel to derbies there's a different passion, you go out there with a bit more fire in the belly." He expected the passion and atmosphere at the inaugural Sydney Derby to be just as big. The Wanderers players were not intimidated of the encounter, despite Sydney FC being favourites to win the game.



Players visit Rebel Sport at Westfield Parramatta

On Thursday the 18th of October at 5:30pm Wanderers players Aaron Mooy, Kwabena Appiah-Kubi, Tarek Elrich, Labinot Haliti, Jerrad Tyson and Tahj Minniecon visited Rebel Sport in Westfield Parramatta to support the club's new short sponsor Westfield, meet fans, pose for photos and sign autographs. It was a successful event that further added interest to the upcoming game that weekend.

The excitement continued to build and the media coverage leading up to the game was significant. It was clear that the introduction of Western Sydney Wanderers into the A-league and the coming of the Sydney Derby had brought much more value to the competition. There was universal acknowledgment that Western Sydney deserved a team of its own and now finally had one to be proud of. With two Sydney teams in the competition there would now be an A-league game in Australia's largest city every week, resulting in much greater Sydney media coverage. Furthermore, having two Sydney teams in the league with clear differences with one another meant that Sydney-siders finally now had a choice of which team to follow and were becoming much more tribal and passionate in the support of their club. The 2 clubs could not afford to be complacent. Each would now seek to outdo the other in the fight for hearts and minds, raising the overall standard.

Sydney FC had until this season been the A-league's only Sydney representative and had attracted fans from all parts of the city. Despite a successful first season where the team had finished as A-league Champions and had built a significant profile, overall the club had largely failed to fully engage the Sydney football community in its first 7 seasons of existence. The inability to grow its match day crowds over that period of time was a testament to this fact. The main reasons that the club fell short in achieving its full potential included: the club's failure to connect with the community; its decision to be based in Sydney's east; autocratic club leadership; the lack of fan engagement; its style of football; a poor club culture; lack of a long term vision; and the instability arising from the continual turnover of players and staff. Sydney FC had failed to exploit the goldmine that was Western Sydney. Reliance on short term solutions such as marquee players and winning games to generate interest and grow the club's fan base glossed over deeper, longer term problems. Promotion of the big spending "Bling FC" tag at the club had also been a turnoff rather than an attraction for many fans.

There had been a lack of success in mending the bridges between "old soccer" and "new football". Many in the "old soccer" community had not bought into Sydney FC, in part due to Frank Lowy's ownership and involvement at the club. Lowy, a former backer of the eastern suburbs-based Hakoah/Sydney City football club in the National Soccer League, had made many key decisions at Sydney FC without consultation and against the wishes of stakeholders, drawing suggestions that Lowy was building Sydney FC in the image of his former NSL club.

Many Wanderers fans had no previous connections with Sydney FC and were more or less new fans to the A-league that had never been attracted to that club, a welcome sign that the competition was truly expanding to new markets. The Wanderers had brought in droves of passionate supporters who loved where they lived and had yearned for representation in the A-League.

There were also many Wanderers fans which had previously supported Sydney FC in its early years but had by now long abandoned the club. Some had ended their connection with Sydney FC when the Sydney Rovers bid was announced. Other Wanderers fans had supported Sydney FC the previous season but were now switching clubs, keen to get behind the new Western Sydney club which they felt a much greater connection with. Wanderers fans in the A-league were a mix of old and new, with many having a history associated with both Sydney clubs that provided extra meaning to the rivalry.

A-league Round 3: Inaugural Sydney Derby at Parramatta Stadium 20/10/2012

The inaugural A-league Sydney Derby was held on Saturday evening the 20th of October 2012 between Western Sydney Wanderers FC and Sydney FC at Parramatta Stadium. The long build up to the game was over and now the teams could finally take to each other on the field.



Fans stop to sing in Prince Alfred Park



Wanderers fans march to the stadium

The evening began with the traditional march of the Wanderers fans from the packed Woolpack Hotel to the stadium via Church Street. Just like the previous home game, the march was amazing, full of chanting, songs and atmosphere. This time the march involved over 1,000 people. The local newspaper, the Parramatta Advertiser was there to be part of it and would later report on the march,

praising the Wanderers fans for putting on a street party and creating scenes and excitement never before seen in the Parramatta CBD. The march again was good natured and without incident.

As kick-off approached, Parramatta Stadium soon became full with an official crowd of 19,126, with the large majority being Wanderers fans. The size of the crowd was impressive by A-league standards and was the envy of many clubs in the competition. The northern end of the ground was packed with the Red and Black Bloc in fine voice. At the other end of the ground, Sydney FC fans gathered at the south east corner, providing support for their team. It was an intense derby atmosphere, full of continuous noise from both sets of fans.

The Wanderers line-up was announced, being: Ante Covic, Adam D'Apuzzo, Nikolai Topor-Stanley, Michael Beauchamp, Jérôme Polenz, Mateo Poljak, Dino Kresinger, Aaron Mooy, Labinot Haliti, Mark Bridge and Shinji Ono. The bench named was: Youssef Hersi, Tarek Elrich, Jerrad Tyson and Iacopo La Rocca. The Wanderers substitutions used were: Youssef Hersi (Labinot Haliti 66') and Tarek Elrich (Mateo Poljak 76').



The 'WSW' card tifo

After pre-game formalities were completed, at 7:45pm both teams made their way onto the field. As the teams walked out, at the northern end the fans in the three RBB bays took part in a card tifo display, holding up an arrangement of red, black and white cards to form the letters "WSW" across bays 55 to 57. It was an ambitious display considering that this was just the second A-league home game for the club and that it involved 1,100 people, many of which had not yet been part of the RBB. The card tifo



Parramatta Stadium packed full

was a great success and could be easily read by the players, fans in the stadium and the TV viewers. Card tifo displays, particularly this complex, were rare in the A-league, yet the RBB had delivered it perfectly. It was a powerful show of support for the team. The display was completely funded and organised by the RBB.

On a hot and dry evening in Parramatta, the inaugural Sydney Derby kicked off. The game was everything a derby should be, fierce and unrelenting from beginning to end. Players from both sides gave it their all as though they had been doing it for years and had nothing left

by full-time. There were ferocious challenges by players from both sides, along with bookings and injuries. This was a hard fought contest where no one team could dominate.

The Wanderers played extremely well, matching their counterparts in all departments. Alessandro Del Piero went close to scoring for Sydney FC on a number of free kick opportunities, whilst Adam D'Apuzzo went close to scoring for the Wanderers when his shot was tipped over the bar by the Sydney FC keeper. After an absorbing first 45 minutes both teams went to the halftime break at 0-0.

Seven minutes into the second half Del Piero won a penalty, going to ground easily after expertly drawing contact from Aaron Mooy. In high drama Del Piero took the penalty kick and scored to Covic's left but the penalty had to be retaken due to encroachment. Del Piero's second shot to Covic's right was saved but the Italian pounced on



Shinji Ono and Alessandro Del Piero

the rebound and hit the back of the net with a left-foot shot to give Sydney FC a 54th minute lead.



Aaron Mooy

In response, the Wanderers, with the fans urging them on, threw everything at the visitors, going close to scoring with efforts from Kresinger and Bridge but with no reward. At the final whistle the fierce contest was finally over and Sydney FC could claim bragging rights, having defeated the Wanderers in the first ever Sydney Derby 1-0.

The Wanderers players, hugely disappointed in losing the game, acknowledged and thanked the fans who in response gave the team a standing ovation. The fans had again been terrific and had supported the team to the very end despite the team going a goal behind. This was an educated football crowd with a great passion for the club. Again, club merchandise stores at the ground sold out quickly, with everyone wanting to get hold of supporter items, particularly jerseys. There were also no reports of crowd trouble. Fans from both clubs got along well inside the packed stadium and enjoyed the spectacle without incident.

The RBB had been extraordinary and was again universally applauded for its efforts in the support of the team. Of the 1,100 in the RBB section, a dedicated core of 700-800 sang and chanted the entire game, even after the team had gone a goal down. Even at this early stage in the club's history, the RBB already rivalled active supporter groups from other clubs in the A-league, particularly matching Sydney FC's fan group, The Cove. The Poznan was again performed during the game, with most people in the three RBB bays taking part. It looked impressive and had become something of a tradition. Wanderers fans were creating the unique football atmosphere that would attract more and more people to the games.

The club and the fans had turned Parramatta Stadium into a fortress. Coach Tony Popovic would later recall: "Although we didn't get the result we were after on the field, the spectacle at Parramatta Stadium from the moment I arrived at the ground was one to savour. The noise, the chants, the entire atmosphere is something that I know the players and staff loved immensely and we look forward to that continuing for many home matches in the future."



The Red and Black Bloc in full voice

Wanderers goalkeeper Ante Covic would later recall in an interview regarding the game that: "Our fans were absolutely amazing, and they have been from day 1, from our first pre-season game when 4,000 came out. They've been unbelievable, and the best part about it is that you can see there's a real passion for the club, there's a real meaning why they're out there. They've probably been waiting for this for a long time, and they've drawn this rivalry now with Sydney and it's up and raring to go, and we just hope more of this is going to happen in the future."

Craig Foster, a former Australian national team player and now media personality, would later write: "The Wanderers fans are coming. Just three matches young, they are already proving one of the most vocal in the league and have thrown down the gauntlet to the Cove of Sydney FC. How so? Well, the true test of a fan is not when the team is winning, but when they're behind and the best can lift a team, drive their players on, put doubt in the minds of opponents and create a home ground no rivals look forward to visiting. And the Wanderers have already excelled in this department. Drums. Voice. Chants. Exhortations. They made an historic night for football a joy to witness live. It won't be long, given the proud history of the region dating from the first game in this country, until Parramatta stadium will be not a theatre of dreams, but of nightmares."

The Sydney Derby was a celebration of football in Australia's largest city and was now an event that fans from both clubs would eagerly look forward to. It was also a match that not just football fans would want to attend, but also sports lovers across the city.

The TV ratings, media coverage and reporting of the game were excellent, raising the profile of the club and the league.

National Youth League season begins

The Wanderers' National Youth League season began on the 21st of October, however the first publicised game for the NYL team was held at 3pm on Sunday the 23rd of September 2012 against Central Coast Mariners at Mudgee Park, Mudgee, NSW. The Wanderers starting line-up for this friendly game was: Madgwick, Williams, Green, Paric, McGing, Elrich, Barac, Olsen, Kaires, Kurdistan and Vukovich. Only around 5 players had officially been signed to the NYL team at that stage. The match ended with the Wanderers losing 0-1.

The inaugural round 1 game for the Wanderers in the National Youth League occurred at 2pm on Sunday the 21st of October 2012, a home game at Cook Park, St Marys against Melbourne Heart. Coach Trevor Morgan named the Wanderers starting XI as: Kwabena Appiah-Kubi, Joey Gibbs, Jack Green, Jake McGing, Yianni Perkatis (captain), Alastair Quinn, Jacob Williams, Jerrad Tyson (GK), Iacopa La Rocca, Shannon Cole and Tahj Minniecon. Substitutions named were: Daniel Barac, Zak Elrich, Aaron Liddell (GK), Nicholas Olsen and Stepjan Paric. The remainder of the squad not listed to play were: James Baldacchino, Reece Caira, Mark Cindric, Brian Jamba, Jayden Koulizakis, Jack Madgwick and Thomas Manos (GK). The Youth League team was sponsored by the Hatlar Group.



The Wanderers inaugural National Youth League match v Melbourne Heart

Appiah-Kubi, Caira and Gibbs were part of the A-league squad but because of their age (under 21 years) also qualified to play for the NYL squad. The team was also boosted by the inclusion of the maximum number of 4 overage A-league squad members, being Tyson (goalkeeper), La Rocca, Cole and Minniecon. These players were to gain valuable match fitness, as they had not featured prominently in the first A-league games of the season.

In an end to end match, the Heart scored in the 43rd and 58th minutes to take a 2-0 lead. In response the Wanderers threw everything at the visitors and came close but with no reward on the score sheet. The match ended with a 0-2 loss to the Wanderers.

The round 2 game for the Wanderers in the National Youth League was an away game that occurred at 5:30pm on Thursday the 25th of October 2012 at the Wanderers Oval, Newcastle against the Newcastle Jets. Reece Caira scored for the Wanderers in the 19th and 33rd minutes to lead 2-0 before the Jets launched a comeback, with Ilic and Bradbery scoring 2 goals in the 44th and 82nd minutes. Caira was sent off late in the game for a second bookable offense but the Wanderers held on for a 2-2 draw and earn their first point in the competition.

W-League Round 2: Inaugural Women's Sydney Derby at Leichhardt Oval 27/10/2012

The inaugural W-league Sydney Derby between Western Sydney Wanderers and Sydney FC was held at 1pm on Saturday the 27th of October 2012, an away game for the Wanderers held at Leichhardt Oval, Leichhardt.

The starting XI for the Wanderers was: Elizabeth Durack, Jenna Kingsley, Servet Uzunlar, Samantha Spackman, Teigen Allen, Trudy Camilleri, Alesha Clifford, Olivia Kennedy, Vanessa Hart, Sarah Walsh

and Catherine Cannuli. Substitutions named were: Alexandra Huynh, Linda O'Neill, Alisha Bass and Georgia Rowntree. The substitutions used were Bass (Kingsley 58'), Huynh (Walsh 61') and O'Neill (Allen 71').



The inaugural W-league Sydney Derby

Wearing the red and black home jersey for the first time, the Wanderers entered a tense, physical contest with their cross-city rivals, a grudge match where both teams brought out their best. Chances remained limited at the beginning of the high tempo contest, but on the 29th minute mark Sydney FC's New Zealand international Emma Kete made an outstanding strike to put the home side in front. In response, the Wanderers went close to scoring through efforts by Kingsley and Walsh but were denied by the Sydney FC keeper.

In the second half the Wanderers stepped up the intensity against a Sydney FC side struggling for fluency, but could not convert a number of chances, with Camilleri going close. Sydney FC held out to achieve a 1-0 win and bragging rights in the city's first women's Sydney Derby.

A crowd of a few hundred attended, including FFA Chairman Frank Lowy and a small, vocal contingent of the Red and Black Bloc who chanted for the Wanderers throughout the game.

A-league Round 4: Wanderers first win v Brisbane Roar at Brisbane 27/10/2012

Round 4 of the A-league season saw the Western Sydney Wanderers travel to Brisbane to play Brisbane Roar on Saturday evening the 27th of October 2012 at Suncorp Stadium.

Brisbane Roar were back-to-back defending A-league champions and had been in very good form in their opening games of the season. In comparison, the Wanderers had so far not managed to score an A-league goal, nor record their first win of the competition. It looked a daunting task for the Wanderers to come away from Brisbane with any competition points. Brisbane started as the shortest priced favourites in the history of the A-League and most pundits expected an easy Brisbane win.

In the days leading up to the game, coach Tony Popovic had spoken to his squad about maintaining belief in the structure and style of play that the team had been playing, and that the results would come. He, the team and the fans were waiting for that all-important first goal to get the monkey off their backs and relieve the pressure to score that had been slowly building.

At 6:45pm the teams took to the field in front of 12,663 boisterous Brisbane fans. The Wanderers starting XI was as follows: Aaron Mooy, Adam D'Apuzzo, Ante Covic, Jérôme Polenz, Joey Gibbs, Mark Bridge, Mateo Poljak, Michael Beauchamp, Nikolai Topor-Stanley, Shinji Ono and Youssouf Hersi. The substitutions named were: Jason Trifiro, Kwabena Appiah-Kubi, Tarek Elrich and Jerrad Tyson. The substitutions used were: Jason Trifiro (Shinji Ono 71'), Kwabena Appiah-Kubi (Youssouf Hersi 77') and Tarek Elrich (Mark Bridge 82').



Youssouf Hersi

Wearing the away strip of red and white hoops with white shorts, and in very wet conditions, the Wanderers dominated the game from the outset, restricting the out of sorts Brisbane side to few chances. In the 4th minute Aaron Mooy came close to scoring the club's first A-league goal, hitting a long range strike that amazingly hit both posts but failed to cross the line. It was as though the team was destined not to score and the fans watching thought "here we go again".



Players celebrate the club's first A-league goal

But the anxiety was short-lived. After 288 minutes without a goal in the competition, the Wanderers finally scored through striker Mark Bridge in the 19th minute to earn a well-deserved lead for the team. Bridge had headed home the club's first A-league goal from a pinpoint Hersi cross into the box after a short corner had been taken by Ono. Bridge celebrated in delight with his team mates. History had been made. Bridge, a Western Sydney product, would later say that he was honoured and proud to have scored the club's first A-league goal, comparing it to the memorable goals he had scored previously in two grand finals for the Newcastle Jets and Sydney FC.

The second half was a more even contest, but again Brisbane was restricted and the Wanderers had a number of chances to add to the score sheet. Striker Joey Gibbs impressed on his Wanderers debut, having been brought into the side to replace the injured Dino Kresinger. Youssouf Hersi was also in fine form, creating a number of chances and causing problems for Brisbane's defence. The Wanderers switched to a more counter-attacking style in the second half and had the better of the chances, yet could not convert.

In the final frantic minutes Brisbane pushed for an equaliser, however the Wanderers defence stood firm and held off a series of late attacks. It was a nerve-racking end to the game as Wanderers fans everywhere – including a small group of around 20 Wanderers fans camped in the corner of the stadium, and a large contingent of fans back in Sydney watching the game at the Woolpack Hotel - cheered their team on towards their first ever A-league victory. Finally, agonisingly, the referee blew his whistle for full time. The Wanderers were victorious 1-0.



Tony Popovic

The celebrations commenced and the Wanderers players took a moment to absorb the magnitude of the occasion. They had just defeated the back to back A-league champions, arguably the best team the A-league had ever seen, at their home ground, and kept them scoreless with a team that had been put together by Tony Popovic in just a few months. The Wanderers were deserved winners and in fact should have scored more goals. This would be remembered as a famous victory.



Players celebrate with the fans

The players celebrated with each other and then went to the corner of the stadium to thank the small group of Wanderers fans which had turned out to support the team. Wanderers fans everywhere rejoiced and celebrated the historic occasion. With the win the club climbed off the bottom of the league ladder, showing the rest of the league that they would not be easy beats and would likely claim more big scalps during the season.

A-league Round 5: Wanderers first home win v Melbourne Heart at Parramatta Stadium 2/11/2012

Round 5 of the A-league season saw the Wanderers take on Melbourne Heart on Friday evening the 2nd of November 2012 at Parramatta Stadium. Fresh from their first ever A-league win, the team was full of confidence and keen to notch up another win, which would be the first in the A-league at their home ground. The Heart team was struggling with injury and poor form, meaning that for the first time in the A-league the Wanderers were favourites to win the game. Despite their favouritism, coach Tony Popovic stated that the team would carry out the same approach to the game which they had been doing since the start of the season and that nothing had changed in the team's preparation.

Before the game the Red and Black Bloc and fellow Wanderers fans gathered at the Woolpack Hotel to socialise and prepare for the game. The traditional march to the stadium via Church Street again took place, involving over 500 fans and turning the heads of onlookers. The march was providing added value to the fan experience on match days.

At 7:30pm the teams took to the field in front of a crowd of 8,075 fans, which included a small contingent of away fan support. The crowd size was modest, largely due to the match being on a Friday night and being a low-drawing fixture in Melbourne Heart. Many members and fans didn't attend. But for the core of 8,000 fans who did attend, they were fortunate to bear witness to the making of further Wanderers history.

The Wanderers starting XI for the game was as follows: Aaron Mooy, Adam D'Apuzzo, Ante Covic, Jérôme Polenz, Joey Gibbs, Mark Bridge, Mateo Poljak, Michael Beauchamp, Nikolai Topor-Stanley, Shinji Ono and Youssouf Hersi. The substitutions used were Labinot Haliti (Shinji Ono 73') and Shannon Cole (Youssouf Hersi 88'). The unused substitutions were Jason Trifiro and Jerrad Tyson.



Jérôme Polenz

In cool, dry and windy conditions the Wanderers dominated the game from the outset. Early in the first half a tackle from the Heart's Jason Hoffman on Jerome Polenz left the Wanderers' right-back in agony. The referee called play on, much to the dismay of the home crowd. Shinji Ono then took matters into his own hands and went right through Hoffman in what looked a clear retaliation. Ono earned a yellow card for his actions, but the incident also clearly showed Ono's passion for the Wanderers' cause.



Players celebrate the club's first home A-league goal

Then in the 29th minute some clever lead up work by Mooy and Gibbs saw Mark Bridge put clear on goal at the stadium's southern end. Bridge calmly shot past the Heart keeper to score the Wanderers' first ever A-league goal at home. The team and the fans celebrated with unbridled joy. It was a moment to cherish and never to forget.

Not long after, Heart player Mate Dugandzic blazed a volley over the Wanderers goal and it looked like it was going to be a long and unfruitful night for the travelling team. The teams went to the interval with the Wanderers having dominated the game and having the better of the chances to score.

In the second half, the Wanderers took off where they left, again dominating the game and limiting the Heart to few chances. In the 51st minute Youssouf Hersi, who impressed throughout the game, made a break down the right wing and crossed the ball into the box which was scuffed into the Heart goal by Heart defender Patrick Gerhardt. Gerhardt had scored the first ever own goal to the Wanderers, right in front of the Red and Black Bloc who were camped at the northern end. The

Wanderers players celebrated wildly with the RBB. The Wanderers now had a 2-goal cushion and all the past anxiety about the lack of goals being scored by the team had quickly been forgotten.



Players celebrate the 2nd goal with the RBB

Down 0-2, the Heart rallied, getting a goal back with a quality volley from Josip Tadic in the 57th minute. With the momentum in their favour, the Heart soon went close to scoring again when Richard Garcia hit the post. The game then evened out with both teams having possession and chances to score. The final few minutes were tense as the Wanderers looked to hold on to their lead and hold off attacks from the travelling team. Nobody in the stadium left early. It was nail-biting stuff as both sides looked to control the possession. As the final whistle was blown the crowd

erupted and the Wanderers celebrated their first ever home A-league win 2-1. Further history had been made.



Josip Tadic



Ante Covic

The Wanderers were deserved winners and coach Tony Popovic was ecstatic in getting the 3 competition points. In an interview he stated: "It was really pleasing to get a goal at home, first and foremost, and then to get a victory is just great for the players, fans and for the club." The Wanderers had again shown that they would be more than just competitive during the season.

The win moved the Wanderers to 5th on the table at the conclusion of the round, a massive turnaround in comparison to having been at the bottom of the table not long ago. To add further joy to the occasion, the Wanderers had also moved above cross-town rivals Sydney FC, which, absent of their star marquee player Alessandro Del Piero, had recorded a humiliating 7-2 defeat to the Central Coast Mariners that weekend. Sydney FC coach Ian Crook would resign a week later.

The Wanderers victory was a significant and memorable occasion. Taking in the moment, the players walked around the entire field to celebrate with and thank the fans. It was clear to see the genuine enjoyment and connection the players had with the fans and that they appreciated the support they were receiving. The Red and Black Bloc, in celebration of the moment, continued to sing long after the game had ended, until all the players had left the field via the players tunnel.



The Red and Black Bloc



Fans on the field after the game

The RBB had again provided boisterous support for the team for the entire game. The core size of the RBB, based around bay 56, was a similar size to first round game (400-450 fans) with 800-900 overall in the 3 RBB bays. The involvement of the bays either side of bay 56 was evident, with many joining in the chants and songs, especially when the Poznan was performed. It was clear that newer fans were catching onto the chants and integrating with the RBB. The rest of the stadium was also gradually picking up the RBB chants and getting involved in them. The songs were spreading.

Afterwards, the field was opened and the crowd was invited onto the pitch. The opportunity was taken up by thousands of fans who enjoyed the rare experience. The RBB ran to the centre circle and took

part in songs and chants. Many fans then made their way to the Woolpack Hotel after the game to meet, drink, sing and celebrate.

Review of start to season

The Wanderers had made a good start to their inaugural A-league season. The first 5 rounds had seen the club record 2 wins, 2 losses and one draw. The team had been more than just competitive on the pitch and it would be no surprise that more success would follow throughout the season under the guidance of Tony Popovic. The coach had instilled a strong, positive team culture, built on discipline and organisation. The players all knew what they were doing and were keen to put in the hard work required. The Wanderers were also an enjoyable team to watch and played an attractive style of football. It had been a solid start to the season after a heap of hard work by all involved in the club in such a short timeframe.

Harry Kewell, Australia's greatest player in a generation who hailed from Sydney's West, flew into Australia from England, sparking rumours that he was on the lookout for a club to play at. The former Leeds, Liverpool and Galatasaray star had been without a club since departing Melbourne Victory at the end of the previous season for family reasons. A key member of the Australian national team for the past 15 years, Kewell was seen by many as a logical signing to the Wanderers to boost the club in its inaugural season. Despite this, Kewell appeared to show little interest in playing for the club. The Wanderers were open to discussions, but overall were lukewarm in pursuing Kewell. Some fans were also concerned over Kewell's intentions, based on the manner in which he departed Melbourne Victory at the end of the previous season.

Off the field, the club's fan base was continuing to grow. By early November over 4,500 club memberships were reported to have been sold and were continuing to sell as more and more fans jumped on board. WestSydneyFootball.com also reached 1,000 members, indicating the growing online Wanderers fan community. General public interest and media coverage was strong, growing the profile of the club and attracting more and more fans. Things were certainly moving forward and the future looked bright.

Wanderers fans were bringing new things to the competition, new ideas, styles of support and a strong passion for the club. They were the club's heart and soul and were right behind the team. The Red and Black Bloc was roundly praised for its passionate support and for the spectacle it created on game days. It was evident in the battling nature of the team that the support being brought to the games by the fans was translating onto the pitch. A solid foundation had been built on which the fan base could grow and grow. This was just the beginning of bigger things to come.

Less than a year earlier, Gold Coast United were playing in front of tiny crowds and achieving a poor community standing. The FFA had made a brave decision to replace Gold Coast with the Wanderers, but now it looked to have been the correct decision. In just a few months the Wanderers had been built from nothing and were already making great strides on and off the field. The club would continue to grow a build over time.

The first 7 months of the existence of the club had been an amazing journey, full of highs and lows, triumph and tragedy and everything in between. It was an exciting time to be a football fan in Western Sydney. The region finally now had a club representing the culture and values of the region. The heartland of football in Australia was now represented in the national competition after years of waiting. The Western Sydney Wanderers had arrived and there was so much to look forward to for the journey ahead.

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