

# Future of Victory coach hangs in the balance

MELBOURNE Victory's players will either save or sink Mehmet Durakovic's tenure at the club with their on-field response to the club's week from hell in a must-win A-League clash with Gold Coast United at AAMI Park today.

the players were aware they needed to lift after an uninspiring start to the season, in which they have rarely played well despite having the best on-paper squad in the competition.

Their listless 2-2 draw with Perth Glory last weekend has sparked a week of recrimi-

nations and ructions. The Victory's board is divided on whether Durakovic should continue. Football manager Francis Awaritefe was sacked and the club's hierarchy rubber-stamped star Harry Kewell's decision to appoint his own personal coach — ex-Argentine World Cup star

Abel Balbo — further undermining Durakovic's authority over his side.

Anything less than a high-quality win over Gold Coast is expected to cost Durakovic his job.

Leijer said the increased scrutiny on the Victory may be partly responsible for their

struggles. "This year the spotlight's been on us a lot more, and whether that's part of the reason for the performance, who knows?" he said.

"We're all professional, we're all dealing with it. And we have to. We've got no choice. We've got big-name players and high expect-

tations. That's what it should be at this football club."

While Kewell is set to play after overcoming a hamstring problem, Danny Allsopp and Carlos Hernandez are both in doubt. Allsopp had scans on a hamstring this week, while Hernandez limped from training on Friday.

## Mariners break Heart

CENTRAL Coast maintained their impressive A-League form but not without a touch of fortune in a 3-1 win over Melbourne Heart at Bluetongue Stadium last night.

The sides looked set to share the spoils in front of 7242 fans after Heart substitute Eli Babalj's 78th-minute header cancelled out a contentious Matt Simon opener on the stroke of half-time.

But Daniel McBreen put the Mariners back in front with an 82nd-minute penalty after Heart midfielder Jonathan Germano was harshly ruled to have hand-balled inside the box.

With the Heart's spirits crushed, veteran defender Patrick Zwaanswijk then put the result beyond doubt.

Heart players were furious after referee Gerard Parsons pointed to the spot prior to McBreen's goal, replays suggesting Germano had used his chest to control the ball and not his hand.

It wasn't the match's first controversial decision, with Simon's opener lucky to stand on two counts.

Replays suggested the corner that led to the goal should not have been awarded despite Parsons ruling Bernie Ibini's effort had taken a deflection.

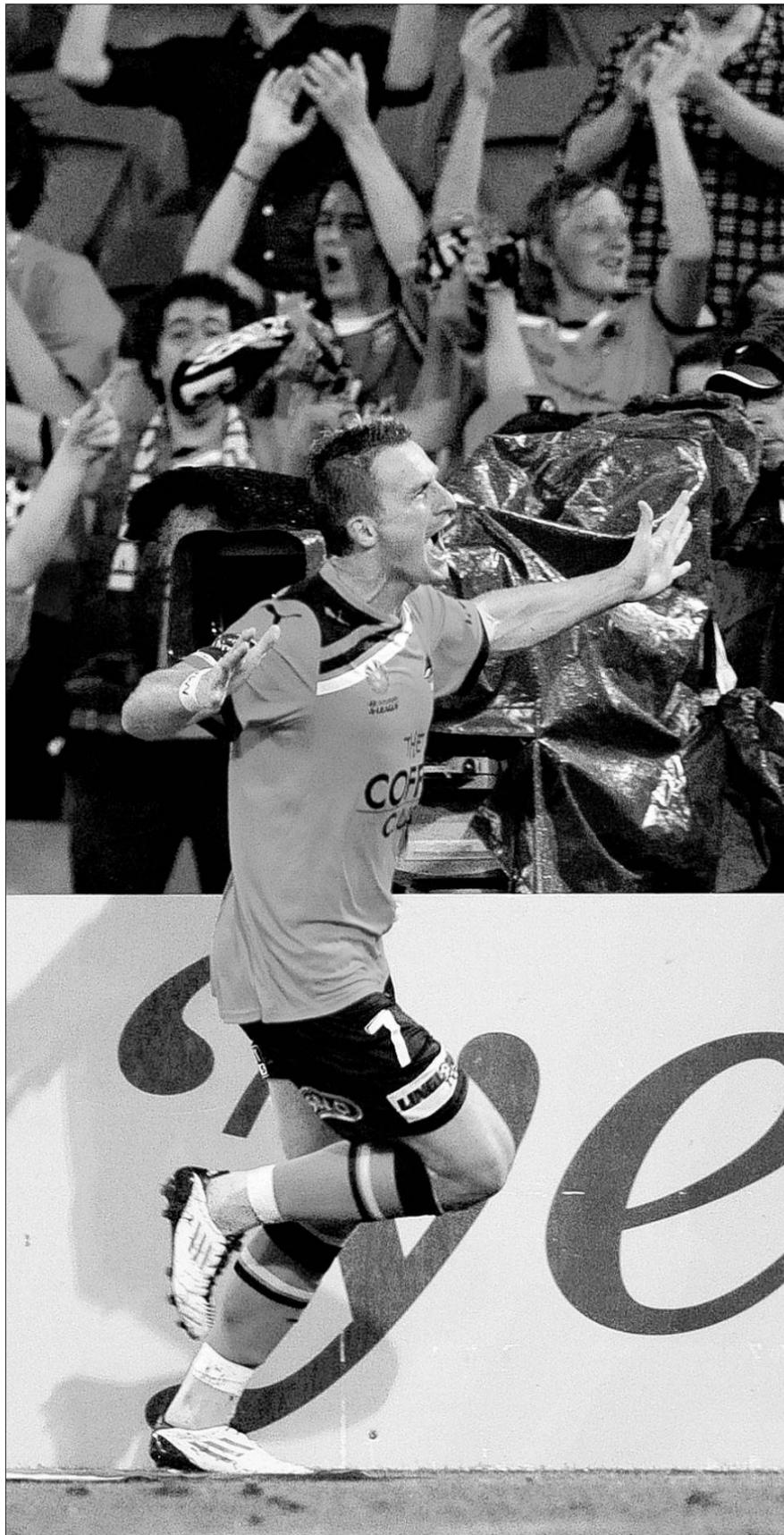
Heart goalkeeper Clint Bolton was furious the goal stood after Simon was shown grabbing his arm before the goal.

But there were no questions about Simon's finish.

From the corner, Alex Wilkinson's header found Simon with his back to goal and the striker did well to control with his chest, and unleash a powerful volley into the back of the net.

**SCOREBOARD**

**CENTRAL COAST MARINERS 3** (Matt Simon 45+1m, Daniel McBreen 82m pen, Patrick Zwaanswijk 87m) **d MELBOURNE HEART 1** (Eli Babalj 78m) at Bluetongue Stadium. Crowd: 7242. Referee: Gerard Parsons.



Besart Berisha celebrates one of his two goals against Glory last night Picture: DAVID HARDENBERG

# Roar still on record surge

By MARCO MONTEVERDE

IT'S 36 and counting for the record-breaking Brisbane Roar, who smashed Perth Glory into submission at Suncorp Stadium last night to set the longest undefeated streak in the history of Australian top-level sport.

Having last week equalled the 35-game mark established by Eastern Suburbs rugby league club in the 1930s, the Roar created history in style in front of more than 19,000 appreciative fans with a 4-0 drubbing of a hapless Perth.

First-half doubles from Besart Berisha and Issey Nakajima-Farran — who finally found his goalscoring boots after squandering a host of chances in recent weeks — ensured the game was over just 45 minutes into the one-sided contest.

The Glory at least limited the damage in the second half but it counted for little as the table-topping Roar cruised to the 23rd win of their remarkable unbeaten run that started in September last year.

Brisbane dominated from the outset, with Perth's first-half tactics of sitting back and inviting the champions to play backfiring badly.

The floodgates opened in the 23rd minute with a brilliant passing movement leading to Berisha's first of the

night and his eighth of the season. Captain Matt Smith started the move, with his direct pass being cleverly back-heeled by Henrique into the path of an overlapping Thomas Broich.

The German star then provided an inch-perfect far post cross that found the deadly Berisha, who made no mistake from point-blank range to continue his amazing goal-scoring rate.

The host soon doubled its lead, and it was Broich who was again the provider.

Receiving the ball just inside the Glory half, playmaker Broich opted for the aerial route, with his delightfully weighted pass finding Nakajima-Farran.

Sensing their opponent was on the ropes, Brisbane then went in for the kill.

Nakajima-Farran secured his double in the 41st minute after a brilliant one-two with fullback Ivan Franjic.

Berisha then made it nine for the campaign with a sizzling strike after a build-up again involving Broich and Henrique.

**SCOREBOARD**

**BRISBANE ROAR 4** (Besart Berisha 23m, 45m, Issey Nakajima-Farran 34m, 41m) **d PERTH GLORY 0** at Suncorp Stadium. Crowd: 19,339. Referee: Jarred Gillett.

# Are Aussie opponents annoyed? Uzbek they are

UZBEKISTAN is deeply unhappy that Australia has enjoyed an extra 24 hours to recover ahead of their high-stakes Olympic football qualifier in Sydney tonight.

Uzbekistan coach Vadim Abramov said it was unfair that his team had to play its previous qualifier last Wed-

nesday in the United Arab Emirates, while the Olyroos qualifier against Iraq in Qatar was switched to a day earlier.

This had given Aurelio Vidmar's Australian side an extra day to recover from the match and to get over jet lag after the long trip from the

Middle East to Sydney. "It's very difficult for us to come here," Abramov said.

His complaint stems from the fact that FIFA switched Iraq's home matches to nearby Doha because of security concerns.

The Olyroos were originally scheduled to play Iraq on

Wednesday, but the game was brought forward because Qatar was already slotted to play a home qualifier in Doha that day in a different Asian qualifying group.

But the Aussies will take any advantage they can get in a match they feel they must win to top their group and

qualify automatically for the 2012 London Olympics.

After two goalless draws, they must defeat Uzbekistan at Parramatta Stadium to vault to the top of the table, knowing that their next match is away against the same team in February.

The top team goes straight

to London, while the runner-up faces further qualifiers.

Australia has failed to find the net in two matches despite a string of clear chances.

"The chances will keep coming if we get players like Mitch Nicholls on the ball," said Melbourne Heart forward Jason Hoffman.