

Adelaide United 2010/11

In the year Adelaide United make the fewest alterations to their squad, they make the biggest change to their coaching ranks, in the process increasing the burgeoning Dutch influence on Australia's football landscape.

The appointment of Rini Coolen, a relatively unknown 43 year-old Dutchman, to replace new Socceroos Assistant Coach Aurelio Vidmar, appears both a bold and conservative move.

It's bold in the sense of 'going' Dutch, when Coolen's immediate influence will be restricted by a near capacity salary cap, a full quota of foreigners, continuing FFA ownership, and barely three weeks of pre-season to work with the team.

It's conservative because Adelaide has essentially played with a Dutch system for the past three years, so Coolen's blueprint may not be too much change for the players to cope with.

Following a mostly Dutch second tier playing career, Coolen has built a modest coaching CV.

Seven years at current Dutch Premier League Champions FC Twente (1999-2006) was followed by spells at two first division clubs; AGOVV Apeldoorn (2006/7) and RBC Roosendaal (Nov 2008-2010).

As assistant coach, Coolen helped Twente to the 2003/4 Dutch Cup final. As coach he guided them to sixth in the 2004/5 league campaign, but resigned in February '06 with the club struggling in 13th position.

Twelve months later Coolen left Appeldoorn, which ultimately finished bottom of the first division. His 18 months at Roosendaal--one of the division's smallest clubs--resulted in 11th and 16th place finishes.

But Coolen has a presence in Australian football circles, scouting for Pim Verbeek during the 2010 World Cup qualifiers, and working under Melbourne Heart coach John van 't Schip at Twente (2001/2).

Such was his attraction towards Australia, in 2006 Coolen considered applying for the Sydney FC job, but decided the time wasn't right.

But now he believes it is, and with a commanding persona but unassuming style, Coolen has promised not to change anything until he's conducted a thorough review of United's squad. He sees himself as more of a manager than a coach, indicating he will delegate responsibility to offside Phil Stubbins.

Stubbins actually made it to the final two in his bid to land Vidmar's job, but says the promise of more responsibility under Coolen has more than compensated for missing out.

What Coolen has to work with is a squad that is well below full strength. Four players - Dodd, Cornthwaite, Barbiero and Owusu - have missed most or all of the pre-season through injury, but even when they return, the Reds still have some significant weaknesses.

The departure of fringe Socceroo Scott Jamieson (Sydney FC) robs the team of one third of its left side, with only Cassio and the somewhat inconsistent Lucas Pantelis to plug the gap.

In central midfield, the robust Adam Griffiths, perennially injured Kristian Sarkies and talented Michael Marrone have all gone, leaving only the injury prone Paul Reid and battling Adam Hughes as obvious selections.

Completing the departure lounge personnel are Brazilians Alemao and Cristiano, plus veteran defender Mark Rudan. That said, it would be a crushing blow should fringe Socceroo keeper Eugene Galekovic join them by deciding to use his World Cup selection as a springboard for a move.

With no money for marquee players, to date just three players have arrived for the new campaign.

Striker Sergio van Dijk (Brisbane Roar), defender Nigel Boogaard (Mariners) and Argentine playmaker Marcos Flores all signed for the Asian Champions League campaign. That they're well settled-in is good because it's vital Adelaide begins the new season strongly.

As the current A-League wooden spoon holder, United scored a league low 24 goals last season, so van Dijk's 25 from 50 games for the Roar suggests an instant solution has been found.

Keeping the ball was also a problem for the Reds. Flores can help address that, but Stubbins says maintaining possession has been one of the priorities of an "impressive pre-season."

"It's something I've tried to instil in the players, faster movement off the ball, better retention of the ball, not allowing things to be played above head height in training. So there's no long balls which creates a better understanding of movement by having to move to receive the ball.

"You'll see a faster brand of football with a better linkage of play, with a transition from the back to the front which will be a much better spectacle."

You would also expect to see more signings because at the time of writing one spot has to be filled, although there's room for up to four.

Relative success should follow for the Reds, as moving off the bottom will mark an improvement, but just how much further Rini Coolen can take them is as debatable as what FIFA will do to end refereeing controversies.

KEY PLAYER:**Sergio van Dijk.**

Reds fans will be hoping that Aurelio Vidmar's greatest legacy will be the signing of the former Brisbane Roar striker.

With a paltry 24 goals from 27 games, United was easily last season's lowest scorers.

Van Dijk scored 25 times in his two campaigns in Queensland, and is good with his head and from dead ball situations.

Adelaide created plenty of chances last season, but simply lacked a cutting edge. The Dutch striker offers that, but it's vital he adjusts to playing more of a lone role up front.

At times in the ACL, van Dijk looked isolated in Vidmar's 4-2-3-1 formation and may be more suited to a 4-4-2 system.vcv

The understanding he strikes with compatriot Rini Coolen will significantly shape Adelaide's 2010/11 campaign.