

Milligan facing fight in midfield

DAVID DAVUTOVIC

SOCCEEROOS midfielder Mark Milligan admits he must return to camp in top shape if he wants to keep his spot, with a midfield crush looming for the next World Cup qualifier.

Captain Mile Jedinak is set to be fit for the Jordan clash, while Robbie Kruse's imminent return should see Asian Cup player of the tournament Massimo Luongo resume a central role.

Melbourne City's Aaron Mooy has emerged as a first XI option with two stellar qualifying performances, while Tom Rogic's solid Celtic form carried on to the national team.

Matt McKay has been a regular, while Luke Brattan impressed in his maiden camp despite not playing.

Like the Asian Cup, coach Ange Postecoglou opted for one holding midfielder with two advanced players, with Milligan playing Jedinak's usual No. 6 role with aplomb.

Milligan, who played mainly in the advanced No. 8 slot in the Asian Cup, said players were reacting to the competition.

"It's very difficult to say what Ange is thinking, Milligan said.

"We had a lot of changes in this camp and everyone stood up and did extremely well.

"For me it's not too much of

a big deal. I just need to keep working hard when I'm away so, if and when I come in, I'm in a good enough condition to be in that starting line-up.

"I'm really enjoying being part of this team. It's very exciting and it's just getting better since the Asian Cup.

"Everybody slips in seamlessly it seems, the intensity at training's always high and we've been taking that into the matches, especially the last two."

Milligan had the shortest trip home of the Socceroos, returning to UAE-based club Baniyas, whom he joined from Melbourne Victory last June.

It will benefit him in the next camp, with the team likely to prepare for Jordan in Dubai.

The Socceroos are trying to arrange a Middle Eastern friendly in the days after the October 7 clash in Amman.

Milligan, who wore the captain's armband against Bangladesh, said the clash would be challenging but the players were confident.

"Last time I was in Jordan I was with the (under) 23s and it was a difficult task. We're expecting the same," he said.

"All these games have proved, not just for us but across Asia for a lot of the bigger teams, the road trips can be difficult."



ENGINE ROOM: Mark Milligan during Australia's World Cup qualifier against Bangladesh and, inset, Socceroos' influential midfielders Massimo Luongo, left, and captain Mile Jedinak.

Matildas 'pawns' in pay dispute

TOM SMITHIES

FOOTBALL Federation chief executive David Gallop has accused the players' union of using the Matildas as "bargaining chips", after reluctantly cancelling the women's team's planned tour of the US.

Desperate attempts to persuade enough players to break a boycott and travel for the two games against the world champions were abandoned late yesterday, with Gallop lashing out at the union (PFA) for insisting that pay claims for the Matildas, Socceroos and A-League be agreed together.

FFA yesterday offered to pay the Matildas from the expiry of their last pay deal two months ago through to the end of September, plus bring forward the distribution of World Cup prizemoney by three weeks, a short-term offer instantly rejected by the players.

They are insisting on a wider deal, including a pay rise and a commitment to upgraded travel, accommodation and playing conditions.

That has also been tied to salary cap and Socceroos pay increases as the union seeks a "whole of game" agreement.

But a visibly angry Gallop insisted any deal had to "start and stop with affordability", saying that any substantive and long-term increase for the Matildas had to mean a lesser sum for either the A-League or Socceroos players.

"The tour to the US is off because the FFA and PFA can't reach agreement over the A-League salary cap," Gallop said.

"The extraordinary demands the PFA has made means the Matildas are caught up in something completely separate."

The next round of pay talks are not scheduled until September 21.

Hayne all over 49ers' chart Sixers show recovery poise

PETER MITCHELL

JARRYD Hayne looks set to play against the Minnesota Vikings after the San Francisco 49ers pencilled the former NRL star in as a punt returner, kick returner and running back for the season opener.

The 49ers unveiled their player depth chart last night and it confirmed Hayne's utility value to the team.

Head coach Jim Tomsula has been cagey about where, or even if, Hayne will play against the Vikings on Tuesday at the 49ers' Levi's Stadium.

Instead of ranking his returners as first, second or third options, Hayne and veteran Reggie Bush are bracketed together on the depth chart.

Bruce Ellington is also in the mix as a punt returner.

DeAndrew White joins



TALENT: Former rugby league star Jarryd Hayne has amazed 49er players and fans.

Hayne and Bush as kick returners.

The depth chart also shows how Hayne has impressed the 49ers' coaching staff as a running back, with the Australian third behind No. 1 Carlos Hyde and second-ranked Bush.

Hayne relegated South Carolina running back Mike Davis into the fourth slot.

Tomsula has repeatedly said Hayne, who only played his first elite American football game less than a month ago, needed to show value to the

team in multiple positions and the depth chart confirms that.

Tomsula could have left Hayne off one of the return position lists like Ellington and White, but instead views the Australian as too much of a weapon.

Hayne and Bush are the only players listed in three positions.

The oldest player on the 49ers roster Phil Dawson, has described Hayne as an "amazing" punt returner.

"There aren't many guys can do what he does," he said.

Apart from being San Francisco place-kicker and special teams captain, Dawson, at 40, has also seen more of the NFL than many of his team-mates.

The father of three, who debuted for the Oakland Raiders in 1998, has witnessed hundreds of wannabes over 17 seasons.

BOTI NAGY

ADELAIDE came back to beat Townsville 90-88 in a trial game in Darwin on Wednesday which had elements to keep both coaches encouraged for the NBL season ahead.

The 36ers came from 39-54 behind at half-time and 16 in arrears during the third quarter to beat the Crocs in a thriller.

Captain Adam Gibson led with a 22-point, seven-assist double and new guard Nathan Sobey again showed he will be more than practice-fodder.

Sobey, who had 17 points in a half last week against Canada's Uni of Lethbridge Pronghorns, finished with 14 at 67 per cent and made some huge plays down the stretch as Adelaide recovered from a 65-75 deficit with a period to play.

Sobey stuck a key three,



FINDING WAYS: Adam Gibson firing one of his assists.

swished two free throws and drew a defensive charge to show great poise in the end-game, Gibson hammering in the final coffin nails.

Brendan Teys, who dominated leading Filipino club side Rain Or Shine on Sunday,

again was efficient for 15 points. The comeback and coach Joey Wright's use of several new combinations still finding their way together, had to keep the Sixers happy.

Townsville coach Shawn Dennis, who lost league MVP Brian Conklin to an ankle turn after just 4:40, had plenty of reason to be pleased as Clint Steindl and Leon Henry stood up in a 28-10 second quarter.

Adelaide's 25-13 last period was equally telling.

"Brian stood on someone's foot and hurt his ankle," Dennis said, ruling out the power forward from last night's rematch at Palmerston.

In Hamilton, New Zealand, the reigning champion Breakers held out Sydney Kings 82-78 in the evening's other NBL exhibition, Josh Childress slamming down a super dunk.