

OLYROOS' NEW ASIAN TRAINING BASE AND FRIENDLIES CONFIRMED

Australia's U23s Olyroos will be based in Malaysia next month after FFA ditched Bangkok as a base following the furore over Hakeem Al-Araibi.



With Socceroos coach Graham Arnold also at the helm of Australia's next generation of national team players, the Olyroos will also play two friendlies against the Malaysian U23s in Kuala Lumpur and a local club side.

The Australians arrive on March 11 and play Malaysia U23s on March 17 in KL. They also face local club PJ City FC on March 14.

The team will be based in KL and use it as a training base till March 18 when they travel Cambodia's capital Phnom Penh for their 2020 AFC U-23 qualifiers.

There, they'll face the host nation Chinese Taipei and group heavyweight Korea Republic.

The Malaysian camp and friendlies were arranged after FFA switched the initial training base from Bangkok following a campaign to free footballer Hakeem Al-Araibi from a jail in the Thai capital earlier this month.

The Olyroos were set to play against China in Bangkok as part of their preparations.

In a statement earlier this month, Socceroos and Olyroos head coach Graham Arnold said the FFA had reassessed its plans because of Al-Araibi's plight.

"Last year, the National Team Department had put some preliminary plans in place to play against China in Bangkok as part of our important preparation for the 2020 AFC U23 Championship qualifiers to be held in Cambodia in March," he said.

"On our return from the recent AFC Asian Cup, we reassessed our plans due to the ongoing detention of Australian footballer Hakeem al-Araibi in a Thai prison."

POLIAS: HOW STAJ MADE ME

Sydney FC captain Teresa Polias, opens up about the positive effect that sacked Matildas coach Alen Stajcic has had on her career, ahead of Saturday's Grand Final against Perth Glory.

Teresa Polias has been playing in the W-League for over a decade but the greatest moments of her career have come while she was under the tutelage of recently sacked Matildas coach Alen Stajcic.

Under Stajcic's leadership, Polias was named Sky Blues player of the season for her outstanding contribution on the field during the 2011/12 W-League campaign.

The following term Polias played every minute of every game as Stajcic led Sydney FC to victory in the 2012/13 W-League Grand Final - the last time the Sky Blues were crowned Champions.

Polias was made Sydney FC captain in 2014, which was Stajcic's final season before he became Matildas coach and included the diminutive midfielder in Australia's squad for the 2015 World Cup.

So it's no surprise to hear that the 28-year-old holds the former Matildas coach in the highest esteem.

"I played under Staj (Alen Stajcic) for many years," she told FTBL. "I played my best football and learnt a hell of a lot under Staj and I owe him a lot for the type of player I have become."

When Polias heard of her former coach's sacking in the lead up to Sydney's round 12 W-League game, it was her job as captain to rally around the several Matildas stars in the Sky Blues squad.

"The girls found out when we were in Brisbane preparing to play and they were rattled at the news," she said.

"That was a real mental battle that game, I remember saying that today is going to be a battle of the mind.

"I had a chat to a couple of them that wanted that and needed that and Ante Juric our coach also checked on them as well.

"We tried to use the game as a distraction. They are professionals and they pulled themselves together to do what needed to be done and they



were able to win that game."

Despite the fallout having a continuing presence in the media, Polias doesn't feel that the reasons behind Stajcic sacking will ever be revealed.

"Honestly, no-one knows anything," she said. "It's a grey area and I don't think the true story will ever be told. I found the timing of it a little bit ridiculous and it wasn't handled in a very good way.

"A lot is coming out now and a lot isn't coming out now. In the lead up, I didn't know about any surveys I had no idea about anything. So on the day I was shocked by it.

"I don't know what else say It just one big ball of confusion."

Meanwhile after a six season drought, Polias is confident the Sky Blues can deliver a victory against Perth Glory in Saturday's W-League decider.

"The obvious thing is that we want to win, we want to be champions," she said. "It's been a while now and we've had the squads to do it over the years and we have just fallen short.

"This is another opportunity and guess what? They are really hard to come by and we've managed to get there again - in the closest season ever and we want to win that silverware."

FURIOUS FFA BOARD DEMAND EXECUTIVE ANSWERS

The FFA are using the results of the internal Our Watch survey to scrutinise other departments as a furious FFA board seek answers from the fallout of the Alen Stajcic sacking.

Following Monday night's board meeting at the FFA, FTBL understands the governing body's national performance unit is the latest to come under the microscope as part of a broader performance review across the entire organisation.

It comes after one FFA insider told FTBL today that it's expected the FFA board - still furious at how the sacking has led to questions about why the alleged "toxic team culture" that led to Stajcic's dismissal was not known earlier - are set to zero in on Senior Management with the expectation that they'll swing the axe.

CEO David Gallop and Head of Women's Football Emma Highwood are two of a number of roles expected to come into probe's spotlight.

It comes after the PR nightmare of the Matildas coach Alen Stajcic being sacked last month, one which has reportedly "trashed our brand" according to one FFA source quoted by SMH.

The sacking was taken because of what FFA deemed a harmful culture around the Matildas.

A PFA report and an Our Watch survey and other

interviews were used as evidence for FFA's case to terminate Stajcic contract five months out from a World Cup.

Our Watch has been established, in their words, to drive 'nationwide change in the culture, behaviours and power imbalances that lead to violence against women and their children.'

It's believed the department of Luke Casserly, head of national teams, is the latest area to be probed using the results of November's survey.

An FFA spokesman added: "Our Watch have undertaken an organisation-wide survey in November 2018.

"This survey was sent to all staff, contractors, casuals, national team male and female players and referees.

"FFA entered into a partnership with Our Watch in August 2018 as part of FFA's commitment to gender equality.

"As part of the agreement with Our Watch, FFA issued a cultural survey across the organisation in November 2018."