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Rabbitohs' return set for live TV coverage

By Brad Walter

South Sydney's return in next month's Charity Shield match is set to be shown live by Channel 9 after generating unprecedented interest for a pre-season trial.

With the final tickets for the resurrected annual clash with St George Illawarra selling yesterday morning, the Rabbitohs will make their comeback before a capacity Sydney Football Stadium crowd and both Channel9 and Foxtel have expressed interest in televising the match.

National Rugby League commercial radio rights holder 2GB has already announced plans to call the February 16 game, but officials insist that no television deal has yet been finalised.

However, a Foxtel spokesman said yesterday that the pay-TV operator was expecting Nine to screen the game live. Foxtel would then follow with a replay immediately afterwards, he said.

"Considering that the game is still four weeks away and it's only a trial, the level of interest is unbelievable," Souths chief executive Paul Dunn said. "People are now asking why we're not playing at Stadium Australia but there's never been a sell-out for a pre-season match before."

The SFS can seat 41,147 fans, and Rabbitohs and Dragons football club members snapped up the majority of the tickets before they went on sale to the general public last Saturday.

Sydney Cricket and Sports Ground Trust marketing and media manager Karen Gregar said there had also been high interest from SFS members, so a full house was anticipated.

Meanwhile, Souths have decided on their away strip for this season - but are yet to submit it to the NRL. The new jersey, chosen from a fans' competition, is white with myrtle and cardinal stripes on the shoulders and sleeves.

Dunn said the club wanted to determine which of Channel 7 boss Kerry Stokes's private companies would appear on the front of the jersey as its major sponsor before seeking the NRL's approval. A decision is expected later this week.

In other news, Parramatta coach Brian Smith yesterday selected new recruits Andrew McFadden and Adam Dykes together at the scrum base for Saturday night's trial against Wests Tigers on the Gold Coast.

Dean Widders will also make his first appearance for the Eels, having been named on a five-man interchange bench in a near full-strength side.

Tigers coach Terry Lamb plans to use a 27-man squad comprised of many young players, including Matt Lockyer, younger brother of Test fullback Darren Lockyer.

The Tigers are still deciding their next course of action after the NRL rejected their application for a new hearing into the sacking of halfback Craig Field. Field has been told to stay away from training and was not named for the game against Parramatta at Carrara Stadium.



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