

Rabbitohs' battle to get ugly

IT'S irreversible — South Sydney and the NRL will be at each other's throats in the Federal Court next week in a bitter, but not necessarily final, act in the dogfight sparked by Super League.

Rumours have swirled around Sydney of a deal being struck that would have seen Souths re-admitted to the premiership.

More than one player manager has told *RLW* that key stars are holding off until Souths' future is determined.

There has also been a strong media campaign to have the NRL, News Ltd and the ARL back down in the "interests of the game".

Double premiership-winning coach Phil Gould has pushed that line hard in his new role as a media commentator.

Most speculation, however, seems to have been based on wishful thinking.

NRL legal affairs director David Gallop made that clear when he said there had been no approach to the Rabbitohs from either the NRL or News Ltd.

"In our mind it (the court case) is really the last step in the process that started in late '97 with the decision to bring the game back together," Gallop said.

"At the end of the day, 14 teams in 2000 was a cornerstone of the agreement and a lot of people have made irreversible decisions relying on that agreement."

One club chairman warned that the court case which opens in Sydney next Tuesday would be a "bitter, knock-em-down, drag-em-out" affair.

He said News Ltd would "take the gloves off" and seek to destroy the Rabbitohs once and for all.