

NRL SHOW

Souths take fight

By JIM MARR

SOUTH SYDNEY have their hands on documents that could change the whole NRL landscape.

Lawyers for the ousted Bunnies have registered papers with the Federal Court, handed over after winning discovery orders against Super League outfits, which they believe will show News Ltd poured millions of dollars into helping those clubs meet all-important criteria conditions.

Souths believe they can now demonstrate how tens of millions of dollars went into Super League franchises by way of sponsorships, indemnities or forgiven loans.

In some instances, it will be suggested, shelf companies were used to facilitate the movement of money.

Souths will use the documents in their Federal Court case, slated to open on June 13, to bolster their contention that the NRL was wrong to overlook a

\$3 million grant from South Sydney Juniors when considering their sponsorship situation.

NRL lawyers, Henry Davis Yorke, advised their client in writing of what was contained in the discovered documents. A copy of that advice was circulated among franchises in the elite competition, and RLW, courtesy of a disillusioned official at a former ARL club, has a copy of the lawyer's letter.

It foreshadows interesting propositions, including News Ltd's funding of North Queensland to the tune of \$29 million for the years 1996

and '97. More significant is the money trail Souths will claim to have uncovered for the two seasons in which 17 clubs were vying for criteria points to qualify for the 14-team competition.

Some of the information outlined in the Henry Davis Yorke communique suggests the Federal Court will hear that:

- Canberra were wholly funded by News Corporation, which poured \$7.5 million into the Green Machine in '98 and another \$9.3 million last year. The Raiders are still financially dependent on the media giant.

- Melbourne received \$13.4 million from News for the two years of the criteria. It is suggested they received a "top-up" payment of more than \$3 million just days out from last year's grand final against St George-Illawarra. Further, that at least \$5.8 million of Melbourne-bound money was tagged as "player top-up payments".

- Sydney-based Canterbury and Penrith were significantly assisted by having 1996-97 loans of \$6.8 million and \$4.4 million, respectively, forgiven. Prior to that action Canterbury had budgeted for a \$7.2 million loss in 1998.

- Brisbane received a grant from News or NRLI (NRL Incorporated) of \$9.2 million for 1998-99.

- Operationally, North Queensland would have posted an \$8.4 million loss for the criteria years. Instead, they were assessed on a deficit of \$515,000.

STRAW POLL

Each week, we will invite our readers to vote on the big issues in the game. You can email your answer to rlw@apaction.com.au or fax us on (02) 9668 6570, or write to us at PO Box 2122 Epping NSW 2121.

Your votes will be published next week, or you can vote at the RLW site at ninemsn.com.au

Should St George-Illawarra sack Anthony Mundine?

Yes No

Last week's result: Did Canberra over-react in their actions against Brett Mullins?

YES 54%

No 46%