

RL: Morris is Piggins' ventriloquist's dummy: Pappas

By David Beniuk & Adrian Proszenko

SYDNEY, Feb 14 AAP - The divide at rugby league's most famous club was wider than ever tonight as South Sydney chairman Nick Pappas and rival Henry Morris traded insults over the proposal to privatise the club.

While Pappas likened Morris to a ventriloquist's dummy, Morris fired back, calling his comments "stupid" and "childish".

The row was reignited after Morris convened a committee which did not include former Rabbitohs chairman George Piggins to establish a rival business plan for the struggling NRL club.

Pappas fired the first salvo, declaring Piggins, a vehement opponent of the privatisation bid by businessman Peter Holmes a Court and actor Russell Crowe, was still driving Morris' campaign.

"Anyone who knows George would know that George is still there, very much," Pappas said.

"I think it's a case of the ventriloquist and his dummy - you can quote me on that.

"We all know George very well and George doesn't take a back seat to anyone. If he is going to sit in the back seat, he's still going to drive the car.

"That's just a matter of fact that South Sydney fans have come to accept.

"Henry is one of the old warhorses of the district, one of the veterans.

"If we are going to move with the times and make this a truly professional and modern club up there with the other clubs leading the pack, we need to move forward.

"This is about making Souths a competitive club, a truly professional club that other people are envious of, not one that they laugh at.

"We need to move beyond these personalities of the '60s and 70s into a new era.

"I would have liked for all this to have happened in a peaceful way, with a nice succession and handover, but some people think they are invincible."

Morris this evening hit back at Pappas' extraordinary attack.

"Nicholas can be silly but anybody who knows me knows that I'm my own man," said Morris.

"That's the only tactic Nicholas can try to damage me with. I think that's very childish."

He said it didn't matter which era the people with contributions to make to the club came from.

"Whoever's got a contribution to make is always welcome in our South Sydney family, I don't care what era they come from.

"I'll listen to anybody, I don't turn my back on people.

Morris said his committee would come up with the plan that Souths management had failed to formulate to keep the club in the hands of members.

"Unlike Nicholas I haven't abdicated my responsibilities and went for a sell-out `cause he couldn't produce," he said.

"I'd like to keep a very low profile on all this but if Nicholas is making those stupid comments I think he's inflaming the situation."

Morris said it was "early days" for his plan and he was still doing the "research" for it, but that his committee would meet for the first time tonight.

"We're going to come up with a business plan, or we're going to start our endeavours to," he said.

"I haven't seen a business plan from anyone yet.

"We'll act with the maturity it deserves."