

NRL warns Souths on Tuqiri

By Steve Mascord

March 02, 2007

NRL officials may block the involvement of two multi-national companies in attracting Lote Tuqiri to South Sydney.

Souths co-owner Peter Holmes a Court last night boasted two corporations had offered to give Tuqiri rich endorsement deals if he returned to league next year.

"Since this broke, we've got two sponsors who've come to us and said 'can I have the number of (agent) Les Ross please because I want to sponsor Lote coming back to rugby league'," Holmes a Court said.

"They're not sponsoring him at Souths. They're not Souths sponsors. They're people who want to get involved with Lote.

"They're multi-nationals."

But NRL chief executive David Gallop said Souths' role in putting the companies in touch with Tuqiri would come under scrutiny. He said clubs introducing players to sponsors could be seen as "one way of getting around the cap".

"There can be an artificiality to third parties doing that sort of thing, linked to one club.

"Club X can say 'you're not a sponsor of us but you can pay this player'."

Holmes a Court and Ross met Gallop on Wednesday night with the participants insisting it was merely a briefing on mechanics of the salary cap.

But it's understood Souths also want access to the NRL's stable of owners and sponsors, including News Limited, publishers of The Daily Telegraph, Channel 9 and Telstra.

A figure of less than \$200,000 is involved but it's a mechanism - used to keep Andrew Johns and Mark Gasnier in the game - that rankles with some clubs.

Gallop said: "We've done it before but the opportunities are not that widespread. Favourable treatment for Tuqiri would be the thin edge of a very nasty wedge for the game."

The other two prongs in Souths' armoury are a \$50,000 third party arrangement with a current Rabbitohs sponsor and convincing Tuqiri's current backers that moving to league would be in their best interests.

Souths' playing strip is now worth \$2.8million after their own redevelopment joint venture, High Concept, joined as a jersey backer yesterday.

The entire deal between Souths and property developer Trivest was valued at \$35 million and involves

developing space at Souths Leagues Club that has been dormant for 12 years.

Developer Albert Bertini said the leagues club would change so dramatically that surrounding land prices would probably rise.

Retailers downstairs, a hall of fame, a gym on level two and other aspects of the overhaul would be complete in two years.

Souths claim to be in the top five teams in Australia for sponsorship income and their playing strip is worth double the 2006 NRL average.

Daily Telegraph