

- Rugby League Week, 7th April 2004

Living on a knife's edge has become a way of life for Souths and their Chairman Nick Pappas - as Glenn Jackson discovers

Why does the club continue to attract negative headlines?

There's an abiding interest in Souths. That's the magic of the club as well as its burden. It's a club everyone wants to know about - the removal and the reinstatement from the competition have just heightened that. I think we've done fairly well in the last year. we've attracted headlines for the right reasons, and other clubs have taken priority. I think we've steered away from its perennial 'club in crisis' tag and tried to chart calmer waters.

Are you confident the Paul Langmack-Owen Craigie issue is dead?

Absolutely. The parties resolved it between themselves. Everyone has agreed that there's not going to be any public comment, and that's the end of it.

Paul Langmack has now become embroiled in two major controversies this season involving his own players. How many more will the board allow?

That's a hypothetical. I've counselled Paul privately about his rapport with those who work around him. He's listened very intently to that advice, and I think he's really showed signs of great improvement. There's no denying his enormous football knowledge. He's one of the most hard-working people I've ever seen, hardly sleeps, and there's no doubt that he will mature into a very fine coach.

So is it his beside manner that needs improving?

Paul is demanding - he has high expectations. (But) some people don't necessarily react well to harsh criticism. Some people need to be cajoled or mollycoddled to get the best out of them. Some people need the sterner approach. It's a matter of picking the right person. You do occasionally get that eggshell skull that can't tolerate a sterner approach.

Has Paul been given a quota of games he must win to keep his job?

Absolutely not. The performance criteria, if you like, that Paul knows and we all know - and we expect it of ourselves as much as of him as head coach - is that the club must be competitive. The supporters have the right after two years in the wilderness and then two years of very lean performance to know that their team will be a chance of making the eight until the last few rounds.

Can you guarantee that David Tapp will be CEO past this season?

I would'nt guarantee anyone's position, including the board's, for that matter. These are season-by-season issues we face. The coach is contracted until the end of next season, so I'll make an exception in that regard. David Tapp has his position for the 2004 season, and if it's successful, he can look forward to the 2005 season.

Was he booed at the post-match function after the win over the Wests Tigers?

There might have been some boos. I can't rule that out. Boos tend to stand out amongst a lot of applause. But I don't think the CEO of any organisation is necessarily the most popular person. If he makes enemies, he makes enemies. There are some pretty unpopular CEO's around the NRL.

You held off the challengers at the recent AGM, but will you be ultimately accountable if your goals aren't reached?

Of course, as I should be. As should the whole board, and maybe senior management as well. We are there to do something. If we don't do it, we've got to go. It's as simple as that. I don't plan to stay in the position for a very long time. I plan to get this done fairly quickly. I'm not someone who plans to be chairman of Souths for 10 years. I want to be there, get the job done and hand over to someone who will make a good successor. Replenishment, refreshment, renewal is very important on boards.

What will happen if the club finishes last again, as it did in 2003?

You can't give absolute answers because if there are a string of serious injuries to key players, anything could happen. If you're stripped of competition points or something... but answering the question as generally as I can, it will be an absolutely unacceptable result, after what's happened in the last few years, and I would expect to be around after it.

So will you walk away if you do?

If the problems that lead to such a result are referable back to decisions the board made or should have made, yes.

As someone who was feted as a hero after the court battle, have you found it difficult making decisions which have probably made you unpopular with many?

It's all about communication. Politicians have to make difficult decisions all the time; they have to make a decision that appeases 70 percent of the population but 30 percent becomes aggrieved. It's the same with a football club. You can't buy all the players all the fans want, you can't keep; all the players that all the fans want, you can't play at all the venues the fans want.

Are there still two factions in the board?

No. This is an urban myth. Sure, we were born out of a factional dispute. Yes, we were born out of a compromise that came out of that dispute. The easy conclusion to draw is that we are at each others' necks at every board meeting. But that couldn't be further from the truth. We've had divisions among the so-called factions, we've had people crossing the party floor on many issues, and we've ended up resolving them anyway. I want everyone happy with the decision. I've never put a matter to the vote on the board. Everything's been resolved 9-0. We work by persuasion, by debate. There is no factionalism, and I'm not making that up to make it sound good.

Do you believe there are former employees intent on destabilising the club?

Not really. People leave organisations all the time, aggrieved, unhappy. With

rugby league, though, it happens more publicly. and people know they have a platform on which they can stand, which is the newspapers. There's no-one in the Souths family I bear a grudge to.

Is there a possibility the club will be relocated down the track?

Not while I'm chairman. This is the quintessential Sydney club. It is a foundation club - there's only one other. We have Sydney in our name, and have always had Sydney in our name, unlike our neighbour.

Can the club be a stand-alone entity in the long-term?

Yes. The sky's the limit if we can galvanise our supporter base. I think we could do what Penrith did, many times over, because there is such a latent supporter base there that is just sitting there waiting. We know they're going to come out - they're telling us they're going to come out. It's up to us to show them that they should.