

Rabbitohs in shock move to Homebush

By Greg Prichard

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EXCLUSIVE

South Sydney are set to make the most dramatic move in the club's history and play all of their home games at Telstra Stadium from next year.

The deal would guarantee the Rabbitohs at least \$1 million per year over four years after they have battled to make a tiny profit playing at Aussie Stadium.

Souths had favoured North Sydney Oval as a venue for next year after their deal with Aussie Stadium runs out at the end of this season but recent negotiations with Telstra Stadium have led to a stunning change of plans.

The Rabbitohs have not signed the deal yet but chief executive Shane Richardson has the support of his board and all that is left now is for the club to make a final decision.

"The advantages we would get from this deal are fantastic and for the sake of the club's future we are looking strongly at going ahead with it," Richardson told The Sun-Herald.

"The money the deal would bring in would take a huge amount of pressure off the club and allow us to spend the money we need to spend to become more successful."

There is bound to be division among Souths fans, with some opposing the idea of taking the club's home games away from their traditional base close to Sydney's central business district but Richardson said the benefits were enormous.

"If you want to get to the top it's no good doing a bit here and there and just hoping for the best," Richardson said. "You have to aim high and be prepared to make the decisions that are going to help you get there."

"This is all about securing the future of the South Sydney Rabbitohs in Sydney and giving the club the chance to function within an atmosphere of stability."

"We became partners with Souths Juniors last year and that helped our financial cause enormously. Now we're looking at this opportunity and it has the potential to help our cause in a huge way again."

"If we had more money to spend we could improve the club's infrastructure, invest more in the team's preparation and be able to spend more on players. We're not spending right up to the salary cap at this stage, because we can't."

Souths would get a similar deal per game to what the Bulldogs and Wests Tigers will get for playing a selection of their home games at Telstra Stadium this season. It is understood the Rabbitohs would receive about \$70,000 per game just for turning up, plus a cut of the gate above a certain attendance figure.

Souths would also receive some signage rights and take full profit from their merchandise sold at the ground.

Telstra Stadium chief executive Ken Edwards said it would be fantastic to get a club with such a rich history to play out of the venue.

"The Rabbitohs and the Dragons are the biggest brand names in league," Edwards said. "To have one of them here would be a great step for us and, we believe, for Souths.

"We've had two months of discussion with Souths and we've agreed on the details. It's now up to them to come back to us with a decision. We're confident the deal will be done."

Richardson said the club had devoted much time to considering the move.

"We haven't made a final decision on this yet," Richardson said. "But we've had a good response from our sponsors and we will always take into account what our supporters think.

"Some people may not like the idea to start with, but I want to give them the facts on how good such a deal would be for the club and for our supporters.

"What I'm most excited about is the fact a great stadium like Telstra Stadium wants to form a partnership with South Sydney and help grow each other's business.

"Telstra Stadium is a fantastic venue and we could make a great home there.

"We would look at ways to make it as easy as possible for Souths fans from our heartland to travel to the games, but the Rabbitohs are a team that has followers everywhere.

"If we start to become more successful on the field - as I believe we will - I can see us becoming the biggest-drawing club in Sydney, with crowds between 15,000 and 20,000 there.

"And after four years we would have the opportunity to move back to Redfern Oval if the bid by [Souths Leagues club chairman] George Piggins on behalf of the club to try to get the ground redeveloped is successful. It wouldn't be built before then anyway."