

RL: Paupers now NRL Princes

League Souths
By Todd Balym

SYDNEY, March 1 AAP - The paupers of the NRL are now the princes, with South Sydney's sponsorship drive ranking them in the nation's top five earners for jersey advertising of all team sports.

The Rabbitohs today announced a combined venture with property developer Trivest which includes away jersey sponsorship and the re-development of the Leagues Club in Redfern.

The deal completes an audacious campaign by the club to secure home, away and training jersey sponsorship.

Souths co-owner Peter Holmes a Court boasted the club had received \$2.8 million for their combined jersey deals, double the average for NRL clubs.

Holmes a Court said the only contra in that massive figure is for plane tickets through Virgin Blue.

"There's no bullshit in there, it is \$2.8 million real," he said.

"The NRL average is \$1.4 million for playing strips and we have raised \$2.8 million.

"I think it's a special place Souths has in Australian sporting history ... we can capitalise on that."

Chris Green from DSEG, a sports consulting business, said the Rabbitohs rate in nation's top five for jersey revenue.

"The combination of Souths' three major partners means they are now in the top five teams in the country for revenue generated from their jersey," said Green.

The acquisition of such incredible sponsorship revenue is a massive boost for the club who won last year's wooden spoon and rarely played on free-to-air television.

Holmes a Court said it was the a "bright future" that sold the club to the corporate world and not co-owner, Hollywood actor Russell Crowe.

"What we didn't do was sell Russell Crowe. Lets make that perfectly clear," he said.

"Russell some seasons may be away making a movie. We can't sell Russell Crowe and Russell doesn't want to do those sorts of things.

"This is all selling the football club and the opportunity to be involved in the football club."

Strong management, club history, the strength of the code and perfect timing were the major factors to help Souths.

"It talks about the strength of the sport right now, the strength of rugby league," he said.

"We were the only one on the market ... We stood in the market and said 'we'll give you these, we can deliver you these unique properties' and the sponsors were there.

"We think it says something about Souths, we think it is a special opportunity for Souths and there's a good rebuilding story about Souths."

The away jersey will feature a black rabbit - highlighting the club's indigenous heritage and and current depth of aboriginal and islander players.

NRL chief executive David Gallop applauded Souths' growing strength as a business.

"They are trying a lot of things and it seems to be paying dividends but ultimately they want to win footy games and the next few months will be a big test for them," Gallop said.

"But no-one could fault the way they are endeavouring to set themselves up for the future."

The \$35 million re-development proposal includes acquisition costs, a \$3 million fit out for the leagues club plus new football club headquarters and 10,000 square metres of commercial space to be leased.

Albert Bertini, director of Trivest, said the planned development would be complete by March 2008 - matching the scheduled finish of upgrades to Redfern Oval.

Bertini said the plans would give Redfern a huge facelift and help improve the image of the area.

"The leagues club will be one of the best leagues clubs," he said.

"We are talking to major tenants now (commercial space), we are talking price and let me just say it will be profitable.

"It is confidential but anything we do is fairly substantial.

"We are looking at more projects around the area. It will have a big impact.

"(Property prices) will go up, the commercial property around the area still has a long way to go for its values to go up but it's going to go up very strongly in the next five years and people will wake up to that."

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