

## Rabbitohs secure new home ground

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The Rabbitohs announced on Wednesday a four year partnership with Telstra Stadium that will see all home games played at the world-class stadium from 2006.

A decision was made to shift the Rabbitohs' home games after six months of negotiations, which will see the Rabbitohs not only secure a strong partnership with a major stadium in Sydney but will secure their financial position for the next four years.

Rabbitohs CEO Shane Richardson says this deal is the final piece of a business plan formulated eight months ago.

"When I first started with the Rabbitohs I was given the mandate of keeping the Rabbitohs in Sydney and we drew up a business plan to achieve this goal," Mr Richardson said.

"The first point was to secure quality staff and rationalise our budgets both on and off the field - which we have done. The second was to develop a strong relationship with South Sydney Juniors which we have done and are continuing to work hard at. The third was to sign a major sponsor which was secure for two to three years which we have done through our partnership with Real Insurance. The fourth was to grow our membership base which we have done to the tune of over 9,500 members. The final piece of the jigsaw puzzle was to secure a strong partnership with a stadium that is willing to help build our crowds and build our business and provide us with financial security for the next four years. Telstra Stadium has done that."

Mr Richardson says this partnership with Telstra Stadium is about more than dollars and cents.

"We wanted a partnership with a stadium that is willing to help us grow our business and to help put us in a position where we can keep the Rabbitohs in Sydney and increase our crowds and supporter base. Telstra Stadium has made a commitment to do this.

"We also want to make ourselves financially secure and the only ways to grow income for us is to work with Telstra Stadium to grow crowds and for the NRL to get a better TV deal. The TV deal is the next big step for the game.

"We don't have the guarantee of a Leagues Club to pump money into our Football Club and our team, so with this partnership we have become the only Club in Sydney to stand alone and be financially secure without poker machine revenue.

"It also means we will be a big player in the player market come June 30. Our fans, Members and sponsors deserve a winning football team and with this partnership secured we can now move forward on that front."

The Rabbitohs chief says this deal also shows a new united South Sydney.

"We've had long term discussions with all stakeholders about this. We've spoken to our fans and Member's at the Annual General Meeting and at the Fan Information Nights we hold, and we have received positive feedback from both groups; we've got the unanimous support of the South Sydney Football Club board; we've got the support of the South Sydney Juniors board and we have the support of George Piggins and his South Sydney Leagues Club board. We are a united axe head moving forward."

Rabbitohs Chairman Nicholas Pappas says this continues the evolution of the Rabbitohs into a force in Rugby League.

"This is another historic announcement for South Sydney as it continues to evolve into a financially sustainable organisation," Mr Pappas said.

"The partnership we have announced today with Telstra Stadium is founded upon a commitment by both organisations to make the relationship a successful one.

"We are delighted to be announcing this move to Sydney's premier sporting stadium, which hosts all major NRL and ARL events and now becomes home to the South Sydney Rabbitohs."

Chief Executive Officer of Telstra Stadium, Mr Ken Edwards, is looking forward to working with the Rabbitohs.

"We see this as a great partnership going forward for us and the Rabbitohs," Mr Edwards said on Wednesday.

"Telstra Stadium is a \$700 million, state of the art venue that offers the best facilities for the fans and players alike.

"The combination of one of the greatest sporting brands in the Rabbitohs, with the best sporting stadium in the country in Telstra Stadium is a partnership that offers great opportunities for Telstra Stadium, the Rabbitohs and Rugby League."

Source: One Sport AAP