PANTHERS, PASSION & POLITICS

The October 2002 Panthers Board Election

Contemporary Documents and Newspaper Coverage

The October 2002 election for the Board of the Penrith District Rugby League Football Club took place amid growing tensions between directors and senior management, particularly General Manager Roger Cowan. Those elected to the Football Club Board would also take seats on the 15-member Panthers Group Board, whose election followed approximately two weeks later.

Although the proposed Penrith–Parramatta merger was no longer a live issue, it featured prominently in the campaign. The dispute attracted considerable media attention, with the *Western Weekender's* dramatic "Board Wars" front page on 27 September 2002 marking a major escalation in the public confrontation. This Digital Archive brings together contemporary newspaper reports, election advertisements and public statements, presented principally in chronological order to allow readers to examine the competing accounts of events.

The documents are reproduced as historical records. Their inclusion does not imply endorsement of the claims or opinions expressed within them.

Explore Panthers, Passion & Politics

Website: Panthers, Passion & Politics
Related narrative: Chapter 18 — The Footy Five Make Their Play (Part 61)

Documents in This Archive

1. Tackling Change

Penrith Press — 17 September 2002

A report by John Perry on proposed changes to the Panthers Board structure and constitution ahead of the October elections. The article examines the competing positions of existing directors, the proposed expansion of the Board and concerns about how the changes might affect control of the Football Club.

2. Brandy Has Something to Give

Penrith Press — 24 September 2002

A report by John Perry announcing Greg Alexander's nomination for election to the Panthers Board. Alexander explains his decision to stand and his desire to contribute to the club's future, while the article outlines the emerging divisions among existing directors and the forthcoming election arrangements. *(Note: This article was reconstructed due to a poor quality scan of the original article – the reconstruction retained the original text.)*

3. Board Wars

Western Weekender — 27 September 2002

Front-page coverage of the escalating dispute between sections of the Panthers Board and senior management. The reports examine allegations concerning earlier proposals for a Penrith–Parramatta amalgamation, divisions among directors over the club's direction and the deteriorating relationship between the Board and management.

Reproduced in three parts:

- *Board Wars* — front-page headline and photograph.
- *Management Under Fire* — accompanying front-page article.
- *Elections Hot Up* — continuation on page 2.

4. Who Is Craig Terry?

Western Weekender — 27 September 2002

An opinion column by Bernard Bratusa praising Panthers director Craig Terry for his role in opposing the proposed amalgamation with Parramatta. Writing in a characteristically sarcastic style, Bratusa portrays Terry as an unlikely hero whose decision to support Penrith's independence demonstrated personal conviction despite the divisions surrounding the Board election.

5. Boardroom Brandy

Western Weekender — 27 September 2002

A report on Greg Alexander's nomination for the Panthers Board, including his reasons for standing and his views on the club's future. Alexander discusses the divisions among existing directors, his desire to bring a younger perspective to the Board and his opposition to amalgamating Penrith with another football club.

6. Attention All Penrith Panther Members — Ron Mulock

Election campaign open letter and voting guide — circa September–October 2002. Exact date and method of distribution unconfirmed.

A campaign statement by former NSW Deputy Premier and Club Patron Ron Mulock urging members to support the Footy Five and their preferred candidates in the Board election. Mulock criticises Roger Cowan's leadership and the club's amalgamation strategy, calls for changes to the Board and senior management, and identifies Cowan's longstanding Board supporters as the *"Four Kinsmen"*. The document includes Mulock's recommended voting ticket. *Source: Reproduced in the Temby Inquiry Report*.

7. Gaming Chiefs Investigate Club Stoush

Sydney Morning Herald — 1 October 2002

A report by Linda Morris on the Department of Gaming and Racing's investigation into the escalating dispute surrounding the Panthers Board election. The article examines questions about voting eligibility, tensions between directors and senior management, and competing views on the club's amalgamation strategy. It includes comments from Roger Cowan and Greg Evans about the conflict and the future direction of Panthers.

8. Cowan Hits Back

Penrith Press — 1 October 2002

A report by John Perry presenting Roger Cowan's response to the campaign against his leadership as Panthers General Manager. Cowan disputes claims about management's pursuit of a proposed Penrith–Parramatta amalgamation, discusses the breakdown in relations between the Board and senior management, and rejects suggestions that he is opposed to rugby league. The report includes comments from Panthers chairman Barry Walsh and a continuation of Cowan's interview.

9. The "Footy Five" — Roger Cowan

Penrith Press — 1 October 2002

An election advertisement in which Roger Cowan challenges the Footy Five's account of the proposed Penrith–Parramatta amalgamation and defends the Panthers Group's broader amalgamation strategy. Cowan questions the five directors' involvement in football matters, criticises their conduct during the election campaign and argues that the contest concerns the club's future rather than his continued employment as General Manager.

10. Time to Put Football First

Penrith Press — 1 October 2002

A report presenting Panthers director Craig Terry's views on the Board election and the future direction of the Football Club. Terry argues that control of Penrith football must remain in local hands, criticises the influence of club management over football decisions and calls for greater attention to the team's interests. He also discusses the proposed changes to the club's governance arrangements and the importance of maintaining Penrith's independence.

11. A Team for the Future!

Penrith Press — 1 October 2002

An election advertisement by Greg Alexander outlining his reasons for seeking a position on the Panthers Board and his views on the club's future. Alexander emphasises the importance of financial stability, supports the Panthers Group's amalgamation strategy and argues for a Board combining rugby league experience with sound business management. The advertisement includes his recommended voting ticket. This advertisement attracted considerable attention during the Temby Inquiry.

12. Time for a Change

Penrith Press — 1 October 2002; Western Weekender — 4 October 2002

An election advertisement promoting the Footy Five's campaign for change, including their preferred candidates and a recommended voting ticket. The advertisement argues for stronger representation of football interests, criticises the proposed Penrith–Parramatta amalgamation and calls for a different approach to the club's governance and financial priorities. It includes a statement by Greg McCarthy and endorsements from Ron Mulock and Merv Cartwright.

13. Last Chance to Vote / Staff Pressured

Western Weekender — 4 October 2002

A two-part report by Michael Kelly covering the closing stages of the Panthers Board election campaign. The articles examine the competing positions on the proposed Parramatta joint venture, allegations of pressure on club employees and concerns about the influence of management on the election. The continuation includes a reproduction of a July 1999 submission to the NRL concerning proposed financial assistance for a Penrith–Parramatta joint venture.

14. Footy-Five Supports Women

Western Weekender — 4 October 2002

A report featuring Panthers Board candidate Glynis Hayne and her support for the Footy Five campaign. Hayne discusses the limited opportunities historically available to women in rugby league administration, expresses concerns about the club's financial management and argues for broader representation in decision-making. The article also outlines her administrative experience and includes a photograph with NRL referee Bill Harrigan.

15. There Is a Salary Cap!

Penrith Press — 4 October 2002

A paid election advertisement contrasting comments by Panthers director Greg Evans and chairman Barry Walsh concerning financial support for the football team. Referring to Canterbury's salary-cap breaches and subsequent NRL penalties, the advertisement juxtaposes selected quotations with the question *Break it and be damned?*, implying that Evans favoured expenditure beyond permitted limits. Evans subsequently disputed that implication in his open letter published on 11 October.

16. Open Letter to Panthers Members and Fans

Western Weekender — 4 October 2002

A full-page election advertisement signed by five Panthers directors responding to claims about their opposition to the proposed Penrith–Parramatta joint venture. The letter sets out their account of earlier Board discussions and decisions, disputes Roger Cowan's interpretation of events and explains their concerns about the club's amalgamation strategy. It also addresses the breakdown in relations between the Board and senior management, including the Board's loss of confidence in Cowan, and raises concerns about the possible influence of staff votes on the election outcome.

17. Board Election Under Scrutiny / Staff Vote Examined

Western Weekender — 11 October 2002

A two-part report by Alison Mills and Leisha-Mae Lang examining the Department of Gaming and Racing's investigation into the Panthers Board election. The articles discuss allegations of voting irregularities, the eligibility and influence of club employees' votes, and the constitutional arrangements linking the Football Club and Panthers Group boards. They include comments from Roger Cowan and acting General Manager Glenn Matthews concerning the election process and the Department's examination of voting records.

18. Open Letter — Greg Evans

Western Weekender — 11 October 2002

A paid advertisement in which former Panthers director Greg Evans responds to allegations made during the Board election campaign. Evans disputes the implication in an earlier advertisement placed by Barry Walsh that he supported breaching the NRL salary cap, expresses disappointment at the election result and congratulates successful candidates Greg Alexander and Col Bentley. He also denies that the Footy Five threatened Panthers staff or management and rejects suggestions that he intended to harm the club.

19. A Conflict of Interest

The Australian — 17 October 2002

A report by Stephen Brook questioning the relationship between the *Western Weekender* and the Footy Five during the Panthers Board election campaign. Brook criticises the newspaper's favourable coverage of the group, identifies its editor Bernard Bratusa as a Footy Five supporter and draws attention to Greg Evans's ownership of the newspaper. The article raises concerns about the newspaper's editorial independence and the potential conflict between Evans's business interests and his involvement in the election.

About These Reproductions

The documents in this archive have been reproduced from historical newspaper clippings and other contemporary sources. Where necessary, images have been cropped, resized or adjusted to improve readability while preserving the original material.

Some newspaper articles are presented across multiple pages to allow their text and images to be viewed at a practical size.

Original source documents have been retained separately. Where a reproduction has involved reconstruction rather than conventional image enhancement, this will be identified.

Sources:

These documents were taken from three sources:

1. The Weaver Collection — a collection of clippings and documents covering the two main periods of conflict at Panthers — the NRL rationalization; the club amalgamations.
2. The Roger Cowan Collection — clippings held in either Roger's files.
3. Clippings scanned from the collections held at Penrith City Library.

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Tackling change

Panthers election 'fireworks' fizzers

by JOHN PERRY

FIREWORKS that were expected by some to explode at a Panthers special general meeting on Sunday were fizzers with only 58 full members in attendance.

Unconfirmed rumours had the existing board's alliances split five and four but they gave the appearance of solidarity on Sunday.

The 58 attendees unanimously gave the directors a free run to establish a new-style board and new elections next month.

The existing nine-director board would be increased to 14 with nine places reserved for Penrith and five guaranteed for nominees from other clubs in the Panthers group.

Panthers chairman Barry Walsh called the move "a positive change" for the amalgamated clubs because they would have five seats on the board when before they were guaranteed none at all.

Nobody would be quoted as saying so but in the lead-up to the March election many of the board members became concerned they could lose their seats if amalgamated clubs such as Port Macquarie, Club Nova or Lavington successfully elected candidates.

"You would have thought they would have seen that possibility when they voted for amalgamation," one ordinary member told the *Press* after Sunday's meeting.

Sunday's meeting also unanimously approved elections for the board of the football club.

The successful candidates would become the advisory board to the licensed club and would represent Penrith on the group board.

Wheels within wheels began turning in the run-up to the election to be held in March this year when Club Nova (Newcastle) and Port Macquarie got up a ticket to vote for

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Tackling change at club

● From page 1

each other's candidates as well as Penrith board members they thought would be the best choices.

That sparked talk of a possible reverse takeover by other clubs taking over Penrith.

That could never happen because the constitution guaranteed Penrith at least five seats on the nine-man board.

How-to-vote tickets were not illegal but are not allowed under Penrith's constitution so some members wanted the March election cancelled on those grounds.

In the end, the best advice they could get led them to cancel the March elections on the grounds there could be irregularities in the membership register.

The battle now seems to have switched to the football club.

What it appears the board wants to do is ensure that the nine existing members win the election to become the board of the football club and de-facto become the advisory board for Penrith. They would then reserve for themselves nine of the 14 seats on the proposed group board with five seats reserved for the other clubs.

Nominations for the group board are open until October 11. Voting will begin October 20 at all Panthers clubs with the poll declared October 27. Nominations for election to the football club board are open until Sunday, September 22. Voting for that election will begin on Sunday, September 29, with poll declaration on Sunday, October 6.

All members except social members have the right to vote.

Brandy has something to give

by JOHN PERRY

PENRITH'S favourite son was determined to give back what he could to the club that had been good to him for 20 years.

Greg "Brandy" Alexander nominated for the board of the Penrith District Rugby League Club along with 15 others.

"I have been thinking about standing for the board for the past three years since I got out of football," he said.

"I decided to do it this time because I want to try and give something back to the club that has been good to me for the past 20 years."

While Greg Alexander was known to be his own man and always said what he believed to be right, his election to the football club board would add support to Panthers CEO Roger Cowan.

"Panthers would not be the best club in Australia that it is without Roger Cowan."

The nine existing directors nominated for the board along with seven others.

The 16 candidates including the existing directors marked (*) and their positions on the ballot paper were: Terry Heidtmann (*), Greg Evans (*), Geoff James (*), Denis Coffey (*), Leo Armstrong (*), Kerry Lowe, Peter Williams, Colin Bentley, Greg Alexander, Greg Chapman, Barry Walsh (*) chair, Keith Rhind (*) dep chair, Glynis Hayne, Donald Felts, John Bateman (*) and Craig Terry (*).

Voting for the election would begin on Sunday, September 29, and the poll would be declared Sunday, October 6.

The current board was rumoured to be split five to four with the five said to be spearheading a *sub rosa* campaign to get rid of Roger Cowan, 66, on the grounds that he is anti-football, has too much power and is too old.

None of the candidates or other members contacted by the *Press* were willing to go on record concerning the rumours.

Nominations would also be called for a new style board called the group board.

Nominations were open until Friday, October 11, a club spokesman said.

He said voting would begin at all Panthers clubs on Sunday, October 20, with the poll declared on October 27.

The existing nine-director board would be increased to 14 on the group board with nine places reserved for Penrith and five places guaranteed for other clubs in the Panthers group.

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BOARD WARS

by **Mick** Kelly
& **Bernard** Bratusa

Management under fire

Panthers chairman Barry Walsh refused to comment on media reports of a 'split' in the current Penrith District Rugby League Club board when contacted earlier this week.

Early Wednesday morning an envelope containing copies of what appeared to be authentic documents was delivered to the offices of the *Western Weekender*.

When asked to confirm the authenticity of the documents Mr Walsh also declined to comment.

The documents, dated as far back as 1998, included the reasons for the board 'split' and management's recommendation that Penrith Rugby League Football Club Limited investigate merger possibilities with neighbouring club Parramatta.

The recommendation carried the full support of current general manager Roger Cowan and the then chief executive officer Mark Levy.

The recommendation was defeated.

Reports of a 'split' Panthers board surfaced in 1998 when the now famous 'FOOTY FIVE', named so by Penrith Club Patron Ron Mulock, rose to public notoriety on the back of a 'STAND ALONE' stance in the face of mounting management pressure to merge Penrith rugby league with Parramatta.

It is believed the 'split' was a direct result of that recommendation and the fact that some directors chose to support rugby league while others aligned themselves with senior management.

Midway through 1999 senior management again recommended that a merger with Parramatta be investigated and again the majority of the board's directors voted no.

In July 1999 a last ditch effort was made by senior management to have the amalgamation with Parramatta ratified by the Panthers board of directors.

It is believed a document, alleged to be carrying the signature of Parramatta's Denis Fitzgerald, was tabled before the Panthers board of directors on the eve of the National Rugby League's deadline for all clubs to indicate an intention to amalgamate.

The date of that deadline was 31 July 1999.

Incentives to amalgamate included a reported $8 million in funding and a six-year inclusion in the NRL competition.

This recommendation was again defeated.

Mr Walsh was not willing to confirm or deny the validity of the documents, the time frame of the events, or senior management's decision to pursue the amalgamation strategy with Parramatta despite the Panthers board's directive to terminate the issue.

Penrith City Councillor and current Penrith director John Bateman was prepared to go on record as a member of the 'FOOTY FIVE'.

"During the last four years the board has been faced with a number of challenging issues involving football, government changes to the way clubs can operate and our amalgamations with other licensed clubs. Through all of this we have managed to keep our football team in the NRL on a stand alone basis. It has been a difficult path at times and there hasn't always been unanimous agreement on what was the best direction for Panthers to take. Disagreements have arisen between the board and management, and some relationships have been strained while others have deteriorated substantially," said Mr Bateman.

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CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Elections hot up

"Reports of a split on the board are related to specific issues," said Penrith director Geoff James.

"The unfortunate truth is that no one person runs Panthers and when the board makes a decision that decision should be accepted and actioned upon by management. Rehashing recommendations that have been rejected, which in my opinion were not in the best interests of Penrith, is not consistent with good management that is required to take Panthers forward," said Mr James.

"The concerns of any member of Panthers should be paramount to every board member and to management, it cannot be all one way," added Mr James.

Apparently the relationship between the board and management was further strained when independent legal advice suggested that management had handled the amalgamation of clubs poorly.

"It has always been about protecting the rights of Penrith and the Penrith members," said Panther director Craig Terry, referring to the 'amalgamation strategy' that has seen Panthers increase its operations by 13 sites.

"The amalgamation strategy tabled by management had many flaws, some of which resulted in the March elections being cancelled. We sought independent legal advice on a number of issues involving the group as a whole and Penrith specifically, and we are confident that we have now got it right in terms of the Group Board structure.

"More importantly the Penrith Rugby League Club has now been protected from any threat of a reverse takeover and as I said that was always the first priority of the footy five," said Mr Terry.

Rumours circulating throughout Penrith that Panthers general manager Roger Cowan's position was under fire could not be confirmed.

However it is believed that a motion of NO CONFIDENCE in the general manager was carried last month.

"I am not prepared to comment on matters discussed in the board room," was Penrith director Denis Coffey's response.

"However I will say that in my opinion Panthers should be the greatest club in this country both on and off the field given its resources, and it's not.

"Penrith has won one premiership in 35 years and that in itself would suggest it's time for a change.

"This club was built on the back of grass root battlers who love their rugby league, and to have management constantly ignoring board directives is definitely not in the best interests of its members, its staff, its sponsors or its rugby league team," concluded Mr Coffey.

The *Western Weekender* attempted to contact Roger Cowan for his comments but at the time of going to print was told he was overseas and unavailable.

Just an opinion

Bernard Bratusa

Who is Craig Terry?

It must rate as one of the biggest messes in any club's history.

The mess better known to readers as the Panthers board of directors' election has been in limbo since March this year – that's the bad news.

The good news is that from this Sunday for those that give a damn, and historically there aren't too many, the polling booths get a dusting off in preparation for one week of voting for the new beaut improved Penrith District Rugby League Board.

The candidates at the time of writing totalled 16 but the mail is strong that at least one has been asking serious questions of himself as to why he nominated.

It's a case of the usual suspects without Kevin Spacey.

We've got the old, the ancient, the faithful, the token woman, the new, and the incumbents. All smiling for the voters, as they attempt to etch their name in 'political' history.

The only things missing are the balloons, kissing babies and t-shirts saying VOTE ONE for truth, justice and the Panther way.

The very sad reality is that at some stage of their lives they did get along.

That was of course up until the introduction of Stupid League and all those gold shekels that came with it.

With this election, as is the case with any other, there will be winners and losers and, come the declaration of the ballot on Sunday 6 October 2002, there will again be both – except this time there may be a very innocent bystander beaten up without knowing they needed to throw a punch.

Craig Terry is to all intent and purposes a no name in the world of Penrith.

Penrith's equivalent to a Clark Kent if you will – without a cape.

He is not a famous well known local.

Never been a YES man, and is definitely not considered as an established part of the 'Panthers Board room' furniture.

But he deserves hero status within the city of Penrith for one single decision – and that decision was to join Greg Evans, Geoff James, Denis Coffey and John Bateman and vote NO to a document that was tabled by Panthers management to amalgamate with Parramatta.

Craig Terry's decision to vote with his conscience maintained Penrith's rugby league team as a stand-alone entity.

Craig Terry helped stop an innocent bystander from being mugged.

Put simply Craig Terry is just another honest bloke who loves Penrith, its football team and knows the difference between what is right and what is definitely wrong.

Hopefully Penrith members will vote in droves at this election, and when the pencils are collected and the votes counted, the right people are left in charge of the asylum because the innocent bystander called PENRITH deserves its own footy team.

Just an opinion.

Western Weekender 27/9/

PANTHERS BOARD ELECTIONS

Boardroom Brandy

Elections for the Penrith Rugby League Football Board had a decided 'celebrity' look about it at the closing of nominations last Saturday.

Local boy and Penrith football legend, Greg Alexander, had tossed his hat into the arena, an arena that for the past three years has resembled a war zone rather than a boardroom.

News of Alexander's nomination filtered through the 'bush telegraph' courtesy of some well-timed jibes from 2UE co-hosts Daryl Brohman and John Gibbs on their Sunday rugby league programme.

"The Penrith club have been fantastic to me over the past twenty years and I thought by nominating for the board I would be able to give something back to the club and its fans if successful," said Alexander.

Having transferred his brilliance from the football fields to the media, Alexander, when interviewed by the *Weekender*, spoke openly about what he thought he could bring to the Panthers' boardroom.

"I don't have a business background as such like many of the current directors, and I'm not for one minute suggesting that I should replace any specific director – but I do believe that I can bring a youthful and fresh perspective to the table," said Alexander.

According to Alexander the decision to run for the board has not been one made overnight.

"I spoke with a couple of directors before nominating as well as my family and wife Tanya and they were all very supportive," he explained.

Aware of the 'split' that currently existed on the Penrith board, as reported in another local paper, Alexander refused to be linked with either.

"'Gibbsy' (John Gibbs) joked about whose ticket I was running on for the election and to be honest I haven't given it much thought. I'd like to think that I am my own man and will get elected on merit.

"In saying that I'm not oblivious to the fact that their will be decisions that will need to be made and I would be looking to assess each and every one as a separate issue," said Alexander.

One thing Alexander was very adamant about was Penrith's position in any future National Rugby League competition.

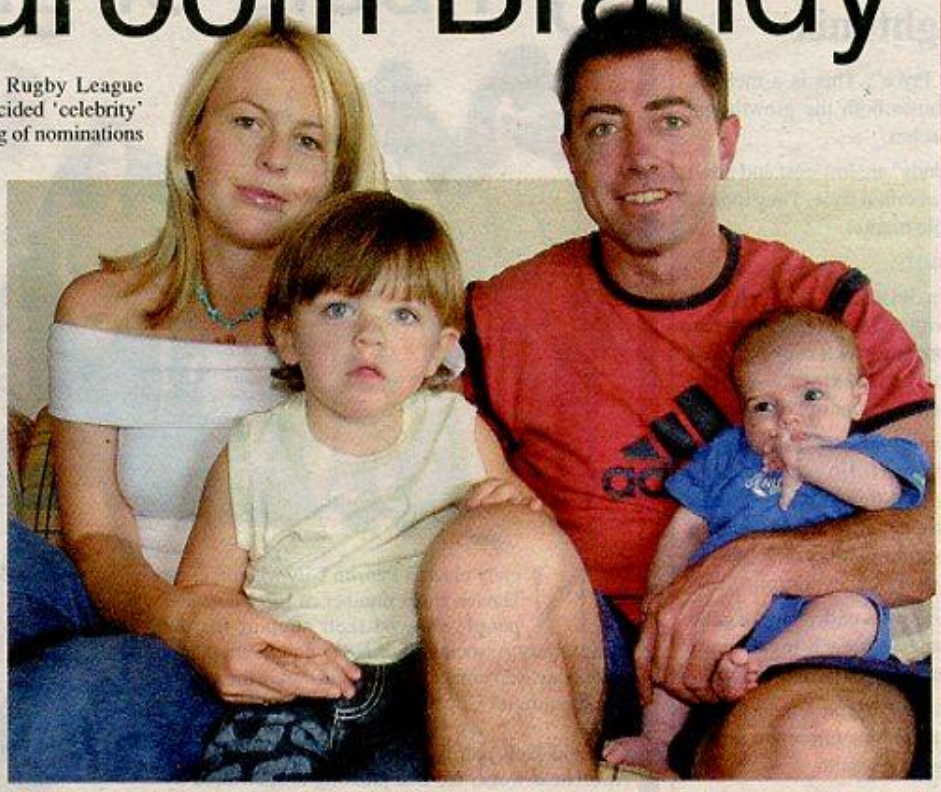
"I'm very passionate about Penrith and the rugby league club, and there is no way I would ever support Penrith amalgamating with any other football club."

Current Penrith director and Penrith City Councillor Greg Evans welcomed these comments.

"It is particularly pleasing to hear Greg express his passion for the city and the game of rugby league that is so inherent in our culture here at Penrith," said Evans.

"I vividly recall Greg's performance in our 1991 grand final victory and the emotion that it brought to this great city. Eleven years on and 'Brandy' is now looking to put the boots on, this time in a very different but nonetheless just as important a game, and I have no doubt that he would prove an asset to the Penrith board if successful."

Polling booths for the Penrith District Board elections open this Sunday 29 September and close Saturday 5 October at 5.00pm.



The family touch ... Greg Alexander, wife Tanya, sons Liam (3) and Braith (10 weeks).

Attention All Penrith Panther Members

Open Letter from Ron Mulock - Club Patron/Life Member, a former NSW Deputy Premier, Attorney General and who has held Ministerial responsibility for Registered Clubs.

The current Board Election provides members with their first and possibly the last window of opportunity to arise for them in the last 37 years.

Don't miss this opportunity to bring about generational change at both the Board and Senior Management level.

Don't be apathetic. Come out and vote the "Footy Five" How to Vote which I have fully endorsed.

Resistance to change is coming from the remaining four current Board Members who can be identified as the "Old Guard" or as Roger Cowan's "Four Kinsmen", take your pick.

This is the first open split of the Board, in the lead-up to Board Elections, since Roger Cowan became General Manger 37 years ago.

Leading the charge for change is the "Footy Five" – or the "New Breed", Craig Terry, John Bateman, Greg Evans and Denis Coffey, who first joined the Board in the last seven years in the period of 1995-1998 plus Geoff James with 15 years service.

In the past week Roger Cowan, a man under fire if ever I saw one, has emerged as Campaign Director for the "Old Guard". He has publicly attacked the "Footy Five" who in the last four years have rattled Roger's cage by challenging him where necessary in the interest of the Club and its membership.

For the Senior Executive of any Corporation to publicly attack the majority of the Board elected by the Club's Membership is totally reprehensible more so while Board Elections are in progress.

The Old Guard or Roger's Four Kinsmen – Leo Armstrong (22 years on the Board), Keith Rhind (25 years), Barry Walsh (19 years) and Terry Heidtmann (18 years) – a total of 84 years have in the past been fully protected by a system of voting based on entrenching those already on the Board of Directors.

With every vote 1 to 9 having equal value a united Board ticket, as has operated over the past 37 years, makes it virtually a numerical impossibility for an individual to be elected. There are literally hundreds of defeated candidates who can attest to this.

This time the united approach has broken down because a few weeks ago the Board resolved that a majority of the Board had lost confidence in the General Manager Roger Cowan. The "Footy Five" voted for the motion and the "Old Guard" against.

The basis for this loss of confidence has been given to Roger Cowan in writing by the five Board members and the issue is far from dead.

One key issue, but far from the only one, is Roger Cowan's role in the amalgamation process, which he has personally promoted and negotiated with the other clubs. This has resulted in considerable dilution of Penrith Rugby League Club Limited's control of the newly created group. From 100% retention of control by Penrith, the current model provides for a Group Board of 9 Panther Directors and 5 from the remaining Clubs.

It has taken 6 months for the Board to overcome what Roger described as 'a blip' when the earlier election was called off. In the process Penrith's control has been diluted by almost 40%.

Need I say it – Roger's chances of survival will improve when the 5 Directors representing the Amalgamated Clubs join the Group Board. After all he has been the driver and primary contact person in the whole amalgamation process.

Voting the "Footy Five" How to Vote will maximise the chances for generational changes.

That's why this is a first and possibly the last window of opportunity for the Members to bring about generational change.

Please take a little time out and vote the "Footy Five" ticket Thursday and Friday (12pm – 8.00pm) Saturday (10.00am – 5.00pm). Vote the Footy Five ticket.

Encourage your friends to do the same.

Ron Mulock

TIME FOR A CHANGE

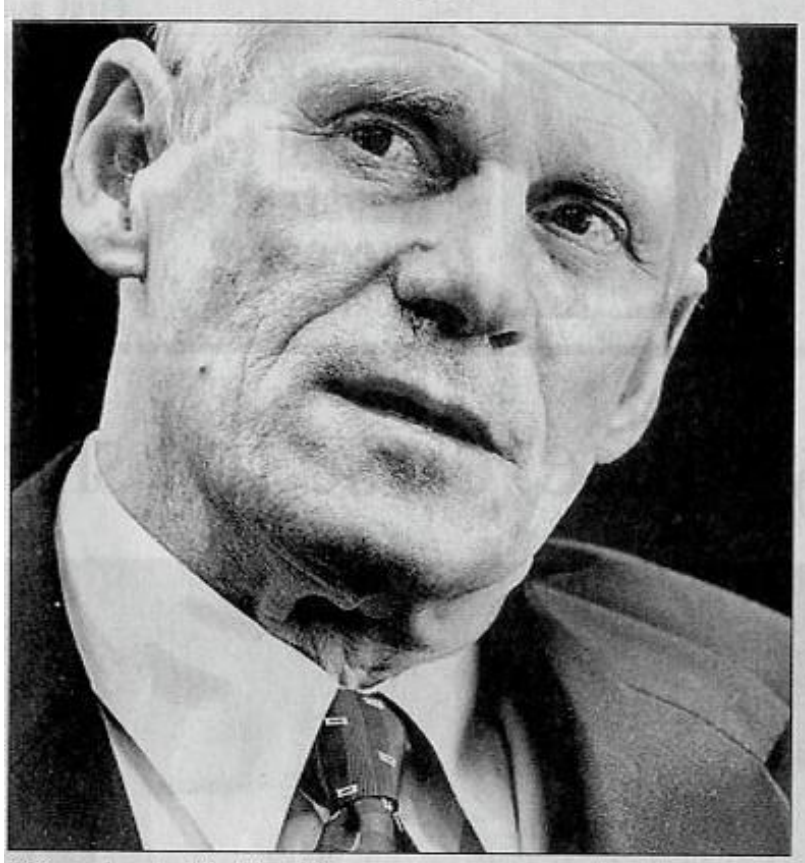
- ☐ Heidtmann Terry*
- 8 **EVANS Greg***
- 7 **JAMES Geoff***
- 6 **COFFEY Denis***
- ☐ Armstrong Leo*
- ☐ Lowe Kerry
- 5 **WILLIAMS Peter**
- ☐ Bentley Colin

9 YOUR CHOICE

- ☐ Alexander Greg
- 4 **CHAPMAN Greg**
- ☐ Walsh Barry*
- ☐ Rhind Keith*
- 3 **HAYNE Glynis**
- ☐ Feltis Don
- 2 **BATEMAN John***
- 1 **TERRY Craig***

VOTING CLOSES 5 PM SATURDAY
YOU MUST NUMBER 9 BOXES

Gaming chiefs investigate club stoush



"If they gain control, I'm in trouble" . . . group general manager Roger Cowan.

Linda Morris

The Department of Gaming is investigating internal board ructions at the biggest licensed club chain in Australia which threaten to unseat its general manager.

A year-long stoush between Panthers' longstanding group general manager, Roger Cowan, and a group of board members dubbed the "footy five" climaxes this Sunday with the football club's board elections.

The ballot will help determine the composition of the Panthers Group board that governs the club empire.

The department was brought in in March when the ballot was aborted amid a dispute over whether members from some of the 12 affiliate clubs were eligible to vote.

Its inquiry into a complaint that members of two clubs were misled on their voting rights is likely to conclude later this month. If the complaint is upheld, the matter could be referred to the NSW Licensing Court for final adjudication.

The row has drawn unfavourable comparisons between Panthers and the conflict-ridden NRMA board.

The "footy five" are director Craig Perry, former Penrith mayor John Bateman, newspaper proprietor Greg Evans – whose *Western Weekender* broke the latest news of the conflict – ex-player Dennis Coffey and private investigator Geoff James.

Staring them down is Mr Cowan, 66, who has been running the club for 37 years and is regarded as the force behind the Panthers club empire and its financial success.

Under his stewardship, the Panthers' claws now extend to the once struggling clubs at Bathurst, North Richmond, Cabramatta, Albury, Port Macquarie, Fairfield and West Epping.

It has assets of $270 million, debts of $90 million, 120,000 members and 13 club affiliates.

However, its rapid expansion is what appears to lie at the heart of current tensions between board and management. The group claims independent legal advice suggested management did not handle amalgamation well.

"For us, we want to keep Penrith in Penrith hands," board member Greg Evans said.

"We want to see a winning team on the paddock. We've had one Premiership win in 36 years. Compare that to the success of Canterbury. We want the financial reserves to spend on the football club, to renew the licence due in 2005, to be part of an elite competition well into the future.

"There is a big difference between having Panthers as a brand name and having it as a football club."

Two weeks ago the rebels carried a vote of no confidence in Mr Cowan's management and he admits he will have serious problems if they win control of the football board.

"If they gain control of the board, and then I'm in trouble, there's no doubt about that," Mr Cowan said from Malaysia where he is on holiday.

Mr Cowan claims the group is running a scare campaign, resurrecting documents concerned with a 1999 merger proposal between Parramatta and Penrith, to win member support.

Their real agenda, he claims, is control of the Panthers' group board.

"They keep on saying they saved the club from merging with Parramatta," Mr Cowan said. "Not one member of the board expressed support for a merger. Not one director voted in favour of merger.

"We looked at it because it was our fiduciary duty to do so, but it was not on then, and it's not on now. What I'd like to see is the harmonious relationship between board and management restored."

Cowan hits back

Boss comes clean on plot to oust him

by JOHN PERRY

PENRITH Panthers management has gone public for the first time to dispel what it called the smokescreen thrown up by its opposition.

General manager Roger Cowan has hit out at claims by the so-called ''footy five'' on the nine-man board, that is, John Bateman, Denis Coffey, Greg Evans, Geoff James and Craig Terry.

Through an overseas conference call Mr Cowan spoke to the *Press* last week about a no-confidence vote carried five to four against him last month by the board of directors.

''We have no confidence in each other I suppose is the truth of the matter,'' Mr Cowan said.

''It is common knowledge a couple of members of the footy five have been intent on getting rid of me for quite a while now.'' Club financial controller Glenn Matthews, marketing manager Max Cowan and gaming manager John Wilson all joined the phone hook-up discussion with the general manager.

In its September 27 edition, *The Western Weekender* newspaper referred to ''the face of mounting management pressure to merge Penrith rugby league with Parramatta''.

''In July 1999 a last ditch effort was made by senior management to have the amalgamation with Parramatta ratified by the Panthers board of directors,'' the newspaper said.

Mr Cowan refuted that and said the fact was there was never any such management recommendation and there was no vote taken on whether or not to amalgamate with Parramatta.

He conceded there was a recommendation to look at the possibility.

In its same edition, *The Western Weekender* ran a how-to-vote ticket on page 11 calling for members to elect four of the ''footy five'' and lone female candidate Glynis Haynes.

''The relationship between the senior management of this club and those on the ticket is, I think, beyond repair,'' gaming manager John Wilson said.

''The relationship has deteriorated to such an extent that if that ticket gets in there will be wholesale changes.

''It won't be just Roger that goes, six or eight other senior managers will go because we haven't the confidence of the board.''

He said the board/management conflict ran the risk of threatening the club's relationship with the bank.

''We owe the Westpac Bank $90 million on assets of $275 million and the possibility that this could threaten our relationship with Westpac just doesn't seem to have entered the

● To page 2
● The ''footy five'' responds
Turn to page 3

Cowan's view

● From page 1

minds of these people.'' There were also reports the management's amalgamation strategy was flawed, which Mr Cowan denied.

He said there were two conflicting legal opinions on that with one being very supportive of what management had done and the other very critical of it.

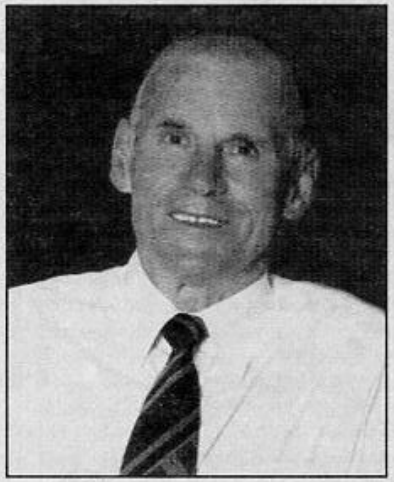
''There was nothing at all wrong with the amalgamation process and it was extremely successful,'' Mr Cowan said.

Against claims that he was anti-football, Mr Cowan said: ''Rugby league is more important to us now than it has ever been.

''Our rugby league team is our flagship and has made us stronger than we have ever been before,'' he said.

The "Footy Five"

Panthers directors John Bateman, Greg Evans, Craig Terry, Geoff James and Denis Coffey like to call themselves "The Footy Five".



They like to perpetrate the myth that in 1999 they voted against a management recommendation that Penrith merge with Parramatta and that they have been busy saving the club ever since.

The fact is, ***the Board was never asked to vote on any recommendation to amalgamate with Parramatta.***

But "The Footy Five" and their misinformed supporters have trotted the old myth out again in an effort to win the current board election.

There is little evidence of "The Footy Five's" support of football. For instance, their attendance at away games, particularly over the last couple of years, has been abysmal.

Compare that to the extraordinary enthusiasm shown by directors such as Barry Walsh and Keith Rhind who attend all home and away matches.

"The Footy Five" are out of touch with reality. They keep harping back to something they say happened three years ago. And their collective memory of that event is - to put it kindly - inaccurate.

They attack our amalgamation policy, which is the single most important policy this club has ever undertaken - ***a policy that has secured our future and safe guarded rugby league.***

I've never come out publicly against members of the Board before.

But the board room antics of "The Footy Five" over recent months have been disgraceful.

For reasons best known to themselves they have tried to sell this election as an argument between themselves and me.

It has nothing to do with me or whether I remain as Group General Manager.

It's about the future of this club. It's about leaving it in safe hands.

It's about maintaining the stability and viability of a great organisation - one that has built its reputation on being honest and open and that solved its difficult problems in the boardroom rather than in the media.

This is a club that had become the leading club in Australia a long time before most of "The Footy Five" had any interest in it.

"The Footy Five" has demonstrated beyond doubt this week what has been of great concern to me for some time - that their hearts are not in Panthers.

Roger Cowan OAM
GM, Panthers

Time to put football first

'Control must stay in local hands'

IT had been a constant struggle to not only keep a football team in Penrith but to keep control of that team in the hands of the people of Penrith.

Panthers director Craig Terry told the *Press* that when commenting on remarks made by club management in this edition.

"We have been close to losing this control on a number of occasions over the past four to five years through threatened football mergers and in a poorly implemented club amalgamation process.

"Why has the struggle been so difficult when the worthiness of these objectives should be so clear and so self-evident," Mr Terry said.

There have been forces within the club, starting from the very top, that did not see those objectives as critical as the so-called "footy five" see them, he said.

"Any actions to create legitimate policy by us are seen by these forces as opposition to be countered – not as direction or policies to be simply followed.

"It is time we got these aims back to the top of our agenda.

"The founding fathers of our club would demand this."

At a recent meeting, members voted to change the governance structure of the club. "The members supported this change because they want the Penrith club and its football team to be a dominant force.

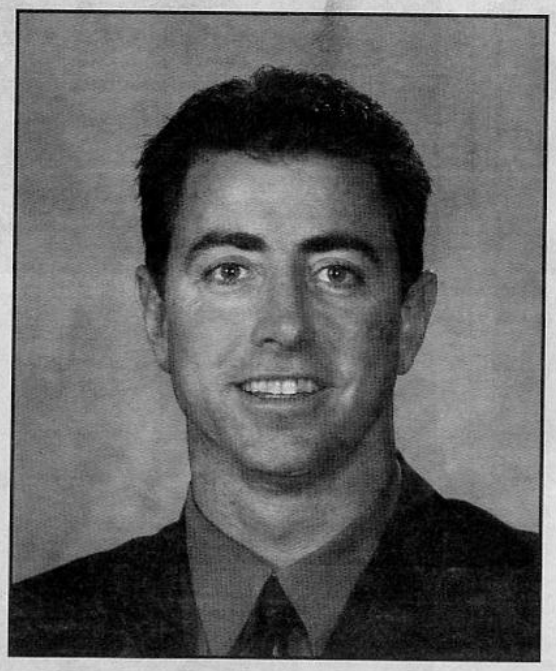
"We are seen to be prominent in clubland but this should also be the case on the football field."

Mr Terry said Panthers had to be seen to be supporting its football team rather than the pursuit of growth at all costs.

If the players, coach and football management saw that level of commitment Mr Terry thought it would go a long way in helping the Panthers develop a winning psyche.

"It is time for a change and the board must take leadership on this issue rather than relying on an entrenched management that has been at the helm throughout our disappointing football history," he said.

A team for the future!



Rugby League can't exist without strong financial backing. A lot of footy teams are no longer with us because they didn't wake up to that fact in time.

Penrith is lucky in that over the years it has had a forward thinking management team and directors who not only live for the game but who understand that it's a business.

The amalgamation strategy put forward by Panthers management is probably the best example of how our club and our footy team have been safeguarded for the future.

There are now 13 Panthers clubs across NSW, all of them contributing to the financial wellbeing of the Group and so ensuring that rugby league remains viable. For instance, just one of those clubs, Mekong Panthers, contributes roughly the same amount of revenue each year as four major sponsors!

I'm really excited about standing for the Board of Panthers. The team I am recommending has a good mixture of experience on the field, in junior league and in football administration.

If you care about the future of the Panthers, please vote for us in the current election

Make sure you number your ballot paper 1 to 9. For a valid vote you must mark 9 boxes.

For the best team mark the ballot paper this way.

- [1] **HEIDTMANN, Terry**
- [ ] EVANS, Greg
- [ ] JAMES, Geoff
- [2] **COFFEY, Denis**
- [3] **ARMSTRONG, Leo**
- [4] **LOWE, Kerry**
- [ ] WILLIAMS, Peter
- [ ] BENTLEY, Colin
- [5] **ALEXANDER, Greg**
- [ ] CHAPMAN, Greg
- [6] **WALSH, Barry**
- [7] **RHIND, Keith**
- [ ] HAYNE, Glynis
- [8] **FELTIS, Don**
- [9] **BATEMAN, John**
- [ ] TERRY, Craig

Advertisement

PENRITH DISTRICT RUGBY LEAGUE FOOTBALL CLUB ELECTIONS

TIME FOR A CHANGE

- ☐ Heidtmann Terry*
- 8 **EVANS Greg***
- 7 **JAMES Geoff***
- 6 **COFFEY Denis***
- ☐ Armstrong Leo*
- ☐ Lowe Kerry
- 5 **WILLIAMS Peter**
- ☐ Bentley Colin
- 9 **YOUR CHOICE**
- ☐ Alexander Greg
- 4 **CHAPMAN Greg**
- ☐ Walsh Barry*
- ☐ Rhind Keith*
- 3 **HAYNE Glynis**
- ☐ Feltis Don
- 2 **BATEMAN John***
- 1 **TERRY Craig***

YOU MUST NUMBER 9 BOXES

The 'Footy Five', namely Craig Terry, John Bateman, Greg Evans, Denis Coffey and Geoff James, were the five board members who resisted every effort by Roger Cowan the general manager to have Penrith amalgamate with the Parramatta Eels.

All Penrith followers like myself owe everything to the 'Footy Five' who held the line.

It's about time the women football supporters had a representative on the board that's why Glynis Hayne is amongst our nine. Glynis strongly supports Penrith as a stand-alone club.

Peter Williams, a banker, will bring financial skills to the boardroom. Peter is against amalgamation.

Greg Chapman, Penrith born son of the late Bill Chapman who as mayor of Penrith City lobbied hard and successfully for Penrith to be admitted to the Sydney Grade Competition. Greg is totally committed to Penrith being a stand-alone club – no amalgamation.

It's great to see former footballers like Greg Alexander and Col Bentley put themselves forward.

MUST VOTE 1 through to 9 – all votes are of equal value. IT'S TIME FOR A CHANGE.

Ron Mulock

YOU MUST NUMBER 9 BOXES

POLLING BOOTHS OPEN SUNDAY 29th SEPTEMBER
CLOSE SATURDAY 5th OCTOBER

* denotes current director.

Authorised by Doug Hayne, Forbes Street, Emu Plains

Father of rugby league in Penrith and St Marys

This ticket is endorsed by
Merv Cartwright and Ron Mulock
two of Penrith's most respected rugby league men.

Club Patron of Penrith District Rugby League Football Club

"Your vote is vital"

Last chance to vote

by **Michael** Kelly

This Saturday's conclusion of voting for the election for the board of directors at *Panthers* sees the end of what has, at times, been a bitter campaign.

In the lead up to this Sunday's AGM it appears as though those times when the voting process was met with member apathy are well and truly over.

It is ironic that the very thing that united this district in a manner that has never been achieved before or ever since i.e. rugby league, has divided us to such an extent.

In a number of other articles in a variety of newspapers it was reported that this election involved a battle for control of the group board following the amalgamation of Panthers with other entities throughout the state.

The club's general manager, Roger Cowan, was quoted in the *Sydney Morning Herald* earlier this week.

"The Footy Five are really living a lie."

"They are pushing the point that they saved a Penrith – Parramatta joint venture.

"There was never a vote. It was merely a recommendation and we considered it because we would not be fulfilling our fiduciary responsibilities if we did not.

"What I'd like to see is the harmonious relationship between the board and management restored," he said.

Too late and one only has to ask why would such men who all have Penrith at heart differ in the visions they hold for its future?

Ridiculous really to think you can live a lie yet be asked to work towards a harmonious relationship between management and the board.

In a marriage such things spell divorce and at a football club it spells disaster.

To simplify a period of time that goes all the way back to Super League and the struggles to stay in the nation's elite competition is not easy, but it is there where the bad blood began to flow.

As early as October 1996 at Australia's Wonderland during a function held for the "*Greater Games of Western Sydney*" it was let slip that discussions had supposedly taken place with Mr Cowan and representatives from the Parramatta club.

The big issue here, apart from the ramifications it held for both Eel and Panther supporters, is the question was the *Panthers* board privy to such discussions on a possible merger?

A Parramatta fan involved with the organization of those games, noted in his diary dated October 4th that Parramatta president Mr Allan Overton and Eels club director and former player Mr Billy Rayner had told him that things were going well as far as the Parramatta Panthers was concerned.

Photo by **Peter** Veith.

Merv Cartwright showed his support for the 'footy five' when casting his vote for the Penrith District Rugby League Board.

That they had been involved in week long discussions with Mr Cowan and things were looking good for the Eels.

And why wouldn't they be.

The vast area covering Penrith's junior league and the money involved with the greater west of Sydney coming under the heading of Parramatta Panthers.

And here lies that point of view or personal philosophy that obviously has split the *Panthers* board.

On one side you have those who believe that Penrith can indeed go it alone in competing in the country's elite competition while others follow the line that Mr Cowan has held stead fast to for some time.

In one group you have people saying that it is of paramount importance to have Penrith people involved with the Panthers board.

While the other is suggesting that Penrith cannot afford such a thing as football over a long period of time in the future and that the Panther's brand name is more important than rugby league.

In a rather heated interview in the dressing room following a Panthers' home game three years ago Mr Cowan informed me that Penrith didn't have the business to afford rugby league and that all Sydney clubs should be forced to merge.

These are not words taken out of context but to be fair they were spoken during a time when all clubs were looking over their shoulders in regards to their inclusion into the competition.

I thought back then and I still believe now that Penrith is a rugby league town and, with proper management, we could always compete at the highest level.

The term "fiduciary responsibilities" on this occasion is one that is based on semantics and of little value to those members who support rugby league at the foot of the mountains.

There are a number of egos involved with all of this, as is the case with anything involving people, but when such men as Merv Cartwright and club patron Ron Mulock publicly state that this is a battle for rugby league in Penrith then perhaps it is time to listen and look for reasons beyond "fiduciary responsibilities".

Mr Mulock stated that Mr Cowan is on record as being an advocate of the competition being reduced to twelve teams in 2005.

"This is probably the first and last window of opportunity for them (members) in the last 37 years.

"This opportunity to bring about generational change at both the senior management and at board level," he said via a press release.

"Come out and vote for the Footy Five".

continued **page 2** ▶

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Staff pressured

31 July 1999

STRICTLY PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

National Rugby League Limited

Attention: The Chairman, Mr Malcolm Noad

BY FACSIMILE: 9268 3250

Dear Malcolm

This is a submission by Penrith District Rugby League Football Club Limited (ACN 058 820 511) and Parramatta District Rugby League Club Limited (ACN 000 254 980) requesting the NRL's approval for a Joint Venture of our 2 clubs for participation in the NRL competition from 2000.

This submission seeks funding from NRL for the Joint Venture entity equal to the funding provided by NRL to the Wests/Balmain Joint Venture, i.e:

In 2000:	$2 million club grant; $4 million Joint Venture incentive; $1 million further Joint Venture incentive; $1 million loan – interest free for 3 years and then repayable over 5 years from 2003-2007 with interest to be at an agreed commercial rate;
2001-2006:	$2 million per annum club grant.

NRL approval of the Joint Venture would entitle the Joint Venture entity to a 6 year club agreement for participation in the NRL competition for the years 2000-2006.

The Joint Venture is subject to contract and, if necessary, member approval. This submission creates no obligation on our clubs to conclude the Joint Venture.

Please ensure that this submission is treated as strictly confidential.

Yours faithfully

For and on behalf of
Penrith District Rugby League Football Club Limited

D. Fitzgerald

For and on behalf of
Parramatta District Rugby League Club Limited

The joint venture submission Roger Cowan claims directors did not vote on.

Former Penrith international John Cartwright is one person who also has some concerns about football in Penrith.

Carty is in no doubt that this is perhaps the last chance for football fans to have their say in the club's direction leading into the evaluation of the make-up of the NRL's competition come 2005.

"Rugby league in Penrith is under threat," he said while his dad handed out a few pamphlets at the club on Wednesday.

"It was proven three years ago when there was a split vote on the merger with Parramatta and I believe it could well come up again.

"The board need people who are committed to Penrith remaining in the top competition as itself, and people who are committed to success out on the field.

"I never realised just how close it was to joining with Parramatta".

Cartwright continued to describe the demise of Balmain following its merger with Western Suburbs only to find that it had, in fact, met the criteria and was to be included in the competition as a stand-alone identity only to fall on its own sword before the decision was announced.

This also probably came under the term of "fiduciary responsibilities" but ask the Tigers fans out there what they think.

And if there are any doubts as to just how bitter this thing has gotten old Merv was requested to stop handing out his pamphlets by the duty manager on Wednesday as it is in the rules despite the fact that employees of the club were reportedly told how to vote to ensure "club strength" (i.e. employment). To his credit, John got him out of there as quickly as possible before Merv got out of his wheel chair and demanded the same opportunity afforded to others.

Those that I know under the club's employment were very aware of possible ramifications of any "disloyalty" in the lead up to the end of voting with one mate of nearly twenty years telling me to "go away and leave me alone".

I don't blame him to tell you the truth.

However, one female employee did tell me that a number of the senior managers did, in fact, advise employees that if there were a change in the position of general manager at *Panthers* they would all resign and go as well.

She said she could barely hold back her laughter and those muffled sounds of the girls surrounding her were, as she described, a good indication as to their thoughts in regards to the esteem such leadership is held by those around them.

We need Penrith people on the *Panthers* board and we need Penrith representation at the heart of any major decision concerning rugby league in Penrith.

As Ron Mulock said don't miss the opportunity.

It could be your last.

PANTHERS BOARD ELECTIONS

Footy-Five Supports Women

Leading NRL referee, Bill Harrigan with Glynis Hayne at this year's Penrith Valley Sports Foundation Dinner.

Over the years the Panthers' boardroom has been the sole domain of men and this is the first time a woman has had a realistic chance of becoming a director of the highest level of rugby league administration locally.

In the past, aspirant directors including women have had little chance of becoming board members. However, this election is being fought under a completely different set of rules due to constitutional changes.

A high profile nomination for this year's election is passionate Panther supporter, Glynis Hayne, who is continuing her fight to have women accepted in a previously exclusively male domain. The "African Queen" as Glynis Hayne is affectionately known, must be admired for her determination and courage to offer her services in the face of great opposition from those senior administrators in rugby league, who have not realised this is the twenty-first century and a partnership is needed between the sexes at all levels of the game if it is to maintain its position as the number one sport.

Glynis said: "I have been a passionate supporter of Panthers for 20 years and believe the club is long overdue for a change. Why I am running on the ticket along with the "footy-five" is because the ticket is one of talented forward thinking people who are the club's future, not a ticket that has been thrown together using high profile people to prop up an administration that is long past its use by date.

"I am extremely disappointed with Greg Alexander putting out a ticket without a woman.

"Another of my biggest concerns is the $90 million dollar plus debt and although the club has assets of $275 million, it isn't assets which count when it comes to the crunch. Although club administration is quick to point out the profitability of the Mekong Club whenever this subject is bought up, I am led to believe other clubs of the group as well as Panthers itself are struggling and the failure of the club group to secure a recent loan for which it applied, gives me the impression even financial institutions are having a similar concern.

Glynis, a former Miss South Africa and having represented South Africa at the Miss Universe Pageant in 1977, migrated to Australia in 1980 and has had enormous international experience as well as being involved in sports administration, service club organisation, exhibiting roses as well as financial and properties management within education since her arrival.

For nearly 20 years she has lived in Emu Plains with her husband, leading sports administrator Doug. Being converted to rugby league from rugby union back in the early eighties, Glynis has attended the greater majority of matches at Penrith Football Stadium over the years and trekked to Brisbane, New Zealand and South Australia on occasions following her beloved Panthers.

Glynis has an open and honest approach to life, as well as administration abilities, financial expertise and a commitment to involving the membership in the decision making process.

There is a Salary Cap!

"We've had one Premiership win in 36 years. Compare that to the success of Canterbury. We want the financial reserves to spend on the football club..."
- Panthers director Greg Evans, Sydney Morning Herald, October 1, 2002

***

"Our rugby league teams have never been denied money or resources. But we won't break the salary cap. Canterbury did and look where it got them!"
- Barry Walsh, Panthers Chairman

Break it and be damned?

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20829511

Penrith Press – Oct 4 P12

Dear Penrith Panther members and fans,

We the undersigned Panther Directors are members of the group Panthers patron Ron Mulock has loosely dubbed "the footy five". We note that contention has arisen in the last week about certain events that occurred in 1998/99 concerning the Penrith Panthers merging with other football clubs.

In relation to a Panthers Board vote about a Penrith/Parramatta joint venture we note that Panthers General Manager Roger Cowan was quoted in last Saturday's Sydney Morning Herald as stating that "There was never a vote".

In last Tuesday's Sydney Morning Herald Cowan is quoted as stating that "Not one member of the board expressed support for a merger on the same issue. Not one Director voted in favour of a merger". In an advertisement in last Tuesday's Penrith Press Roger Cowan states that the suggestion that there was a Board vote on a management recommendation to merge with Parramatta in 1999 is a myth.

He has also been quoted as stating that we the "footy five" are "living a lie" in regards to our involvement in stopping a Penrith/Parramatta football merger/joint venture. We believe that the time has now come to put the facts on the table in order that Panthers members can make up their own minds about how close our football team came to becoming the Parramatta Panthers.

On **4 August 1998** the Board received a report from Roger Cowan in relation to standing alone in which he stated. **"I believe the risks are far too great and strongly recommend we merge"**. He also recommended Parramatta as a first choice partner and stated if "Parramatta were to go elsewhere we should make Canterbury our target". **The Board NOTED the Report.**

On **25 August 1998** the Board resolved to: **"reiterate its preference to stand alone and arrange a members information forum to discuss Penrith's future in the NRL".**

On **8 September 1998** following the members information meeting held on 7 September the Board resolved: **"that Panthers cease all joint venture/merger negotiations with other clubs and stand alone in the NRL competition".** The resolution was carried on a split 5 - 3 vote. One Director was not present. Each of ourselves voted in favour of the resolution.

Some 10 months later on **20 July 1999** Roger Cowan presented a further paper to the Board outlining the risks of standing alone. The Board resolved that the report be noted and reaffirmed its stand-alone position regarding the NRL competition.

On **31 July 1999** a special Board meeting was held at Roger Cowan's request at which he tabled a written submission by the Penrith and Parramatta clubs to the NRL requesting the NRL's approval for a joint venture of the two clubs for participation in the NRL competition from 2000. The submission document had already been signed by Denis Fitzgerald on behalf of the Parramatta Club. The Board resolved on a split vote not to proceed with Penrith/Parramatta joint venture submission to the NRL. Each of ourselves voted this way. Two of the Board members who voted otherwise requested that their names be recorded as doing so.

Subsequently at a Board meeting held on 24 January 2000 the Board resolved at the suggestion of ourselves to propose amendments to the football clubs constitution, so that in the future the Board of directors could not allow or permit the football club to merge with or enter in to a joint venture or similar arrangement with any other party without first convening an extraordinary general meeting of the football club, so as to allow football club members to vote on the issue. This motion was carried at the AGM of the football club held on 26 March 2000. The effect of the resolution was to prohibit the Board of the football club from making another major decision about our football team's involvement in the NRL competition without first obtaining approval of the football club members.

The issue of football mergers was the catalyst for the initial split between Board members themselves and between the majority of the Board and Roger Cowan. There have been a number of equally important issues in which the Board and Roger Cowan have been at odds in recent years as was alluded to by him this week in the media. Primary amongst these was Panther's amalgamations with other licensed clubs where disputes arose as to how to best protect Penrith Panthers members in the amalgamation process.

We wanted to ensure that Panthers was kept in Penrith's hands and that it could not be the subject of a reverse takeover by any other club that we amalgamated with. On two occasions we rejected proposals put forward by Roger Cowan in which he proposed that Penrith have only a minority representation on the ultimate controlling entity of the expanded Panthers organisation.

The majority of the Board are less that satisfied with managements conduct of these amalgamations with other licensed clubs and in particular the action of certain members of senior management over the past six months. This culminated in Roger Cowan requesting a Board vote of confidence in him as General manager last month. By split vote 5 - 3 the Board advised the General Manager that he did not enjoy their confidence. One Board member was absent.

The outcome of this week's football club elections will obviously have an effect on the club's future. Our concern is the impact that staff voting may have on the outcome of the final vote. Members of the club staff have already provided some of us with information about the directions that they have received to both vote and how to vote in the election.

It is imperative that all Penrith Panther members are aware of the facts. It is also important that they exercise their rights to vote in this very important election. The only question they have to ask themselves is whether they want more of the same or whether its time to change. We strongly believe in putting footy first and in keeping Panthers in Penrith's hands.

Yours faithfully,

Geoff James John Bateman Dennis Coffey

Greg Evans Craig Terry

Board election under scrutiny

by **Alison** Mills and **Leisha-Mae** Lang

The New South Wales Department of Gaming and Racing will examine all records pertaining to the election of the Penrith District Rugby League Board.

Immediately following the announcement of the election results at the Penrith District Rugby League Football Club Limited General Meeting, held at Panthers on Sunday, Panthers General Manager, Roger Cowan read a letter from the Department of Gaming and Racing revealing the Department's plans to examine the election process.

"...The Department intends to provide a formal request pursuant to S.35A of the Registered Clubs Act 1976 to obtain all records including ballot registration and papers pertaining to the election." Assistant Director of Compliance, Albert Gardner wrote in a segment of the letter: "Please ensure they are collated and stored in a secure location until such time [as] they can be examined by my officers.

"Further, please ensure an announcement is made when the ballot is declared on Sunday, 6 October 2002 so as to advise those present at the Club of the Department's intention to obtain and examine the records."

The Western Weekender understands that, while there are no allegations of impropriety, the Department's examination will initially look at two issues; firstly, it will establish whether Panthers' staff voted in the election and, secondly, whether they were entitled to vote and if this had any impact on the outcome of the election.

It is also understood that if the inquiry does establish that staff voted and were not entitled to do so, then the question of the validity of the ballot would have to be further examined.

In this case, the Department would seek legal advice as to the next course of action, one option being to declare the ballot invalid and call for a fresh election.

The legal complication in this situation is that, while staff are technically entitled to vote for the football club board, the nine elected members of that board become the de facto Advisory Board for the Penrith Rugby League Club Ltd and automatically go forward to the Panthers Group Board.

contined **page 7** ▶

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

Staff vote examined

The provision allowing the progression of football club directors to the Group Board is the result of an amendment to Panthers' Constitution earlier this year.

Ivor Jones, a director of Metro Poll Pty Ltd, which conducted the election on behalf of the club, declined to comment on the Department's examination of records relating to the poll.

Mr Jones said he was waiting to hear from the Department as to what documentation it would require for the examination.

A number of concerns have already been raised about the way the election was conducted, with several prominent locals openly questioning aspects of the process at the General Meeting.

One of the primary concerns raised was the effect staff voting had on the outcome of the results and the influence exerted by Panthers management over staff. Panthers' staff were advised they were allowed to vote for the first time as a result of the election being changed from a Licensed Club election to a District Club election.

However, a question from the floor at the General Meeting raised the issue of whether it was intimated to staff that their jobs would be jeopardised or their hours curtailed if board members or candidates were elected other than those endorsed by senior management.

"I have had no part or dealings with any of those things, they'll be answerable by management," said Panthers Chairman Barry Walsh. "I have no knowledge of those other things because I was never in attendance or briefed on it."

With Mr Walsh unable to answer the question, it was redirected to General Manager, Roger Cowan, who told the meeting he was overseas in the lead up to the election.

"'Did management intimate to members of staff that their jobs were in jeopardy?' Well, I've asked that question since I've come back and as far as I've been informed, that was not done," said Mr Cowan. "Nobody was threatened with anything and even if they were it was a secret ballot so I don't see how anybody could be told how to vote."

However, Glen Matthews, who was acting General Manager, confirmed that Panthers team leaders were handed how to vote cards at a meeting held on Friday, September 27, two days before the election started.

"My job at that meeting was to inform staff of their entitlement to vote and also to give them all the information that we had on it," said Mr Matthews.

A Panthers how to vote card passed on to the *Weekender*, which advised staff to vote for Terry Heidtmann, Leo Armstrong, Kerry Lowe, Colin Bentley, Greg Alexander, Greg Chapman, Barry Walsh, Keith Rhind and Don Feltis, - all of whom were elected - suggested the extent to which staff voting may have influenced the election.

There are no details at this stage of the Department's timetable for the examination of the election records.

"OPEN LETTER"

Advertisement

My name is Greg Evans and over the past two weeks I have been subjected to innuendo and rumour mongering by the Senior Management and Management of Panthers, presented through the news media, their website and also through word of mouth.

I take this opportunity to state without fear or favour the following to be true and correct.

As a former director of Panthers, I at all times had the best interests of Panthers staff, members and rugby league at heart.

The advertisement placed in the *Penrith Press* last Friday by Panthers Chairman, Barry Walsh inferring that my comment regarding Penrith and Canterbury in the Sydney Morning Herald was in support of our breaching of the salary cap is inaccurate.

The comment was deliberately taken out of context.

Rather than publicly debate the point, I will let the fullness of time and the appropriate channels judge Mr Walsh's advertisement.

As for the election result I am naturally disappointed.

Disappointed also for my colleagues, John Bateman, Denis Coffey, Geoff James and Craig Terry who spent untold hours keeping Penrith strong as a stand-alone rugby league identity.

I take this opportunity to congratulate those candidates successful in the election, particularly Greg Alexander and Col Bentley.

Their involvement in the club as players saw Penrith hold high the treasured prize of winning a grand final. I hope their involvement at board level is just as successful.

In closing I would like to make it very clear that at no time were the staff under threat from the footy five.

At no time did the footy five threaten Management with dismissal.

And at no time did I look to harm this great city of Penrith.

A conflict of interest

➤IN Penrith, west of Sydney, the local *Western Weekender* has been shamelessly supporting local businessman **Greg Evans** in his election battle against management of the giant Penrith Panthers rugby league club, which operates a vast entertainment complex and has assets of $270 million. *Western Weekender* editor **Bernard Bratusa** was only too happy to run stories in favour of the Footy Five — a group of rebel board members including Evans who were campaigning against the club's management. Almost all the stories failed to mention Evans' links with the paper. He owns it. Club members did a spot of editorialising of their own during this month's vote, kicking the entire Footy Five off the board.