



AUSTRALIAN  
INDIGENOUS  
EDUCATION  
FOUNDATION

## A dream job in league of its own



JANE DEMPSTER

Tanika Perry with the Rabbitohs' Nathan Merritt, a member of the Indigenous All Stars

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TANIKA Perry was born into a love of rugby league.

Her father is a passionate league man and sponsors the local team, the Forster-Tuncurry Hawkes, on the NSW north coast.

"He's why my whole family is keen on football. We've grown up with it," she said.

Yet even her father was surprised when Tanika wanted to play the game and, at the age of five, became the only girl in her local team.

Players that young are not supposed to tackle but Tanika did.

"I just love the whole game. I played until I was seven or eight, and my dad coached me one year, then he said I better play a girl's game so I started netball," Tanika said.

Although netball has become her favourite game to play, Tanika's love for league endures and remains a focus for family gatherings.

It will also become the centre of her life this year when she starts her new job in a couple of weeks in a traineeship with the NRL in event management.

She will be working with the NRL team that organises events for special games, including the State of Origin, the finals series and the Indigenous All Stars game, as well as big corporate events.

"It's my dream job — I can't believe it. It doesn't feel real," she said.

Tanika has just completed Year 12 after boarding for two years at Kincoppal Rose Bay in Sydney's eastern suburbs with the support of the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation.

The AIEF provides scholar-

ships at private boarding schools as well as one-on-one career case management to help students make the transition from school into careers of their choosing.

The foundation assisted Tanika in applying for the NRL traineeship, building on her passion for league and interest in a career in event management that was sparked by assisting at school fundraisers and at the South Sydney Rabbitohs' Green and Red Ball.

As well as working at the NRL, Tanika is enrolled to do a TAFE course in event management and hopes one day to complete a degree at university in her chosen field. "I had wanted to do sports management but I looked at event management and that grabbed me. I had never thought about it before but it matches my personality," she said.

"I'm very confident, I'm very organised and friendly. I like talking

to people and organising parties.

"It felt very good at the end of the Rabbitohs' ball to say I had helped stage the big night."

AIEF chief executive Andrew Penfold said the foundation had built support and goodwill through an extensive corporate network, with many of the nation's leading businessmen, including NRL chief executive David Gallop, appointed ambassadors.

"There aren't many doors we can't open for indigenous kids who are passionate and determined to make a difference, like Tanika," he said.

"Ultimately, we are in the business of making dreams happen for indigenous kids, but they have to do all the hard work themselves, and this is the beauty of education as a transformative tool.

"We can't raise money fast enough to help them all, but we keep grinding away, one dream at a time."