

## Dream job comes true

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SAYING Tanika Perry likes rugby league is an understatement.

Growing up in Forster, she played with the Forster Tuncurry Hawkes, from age five until about seven. She was the only girl in the team, coached for a time by her father, Mick, a sponsor of the local side and "mad Bulldogs supporter".

She started playing netball then and moved into representative netball but remained passionate about football.

That's why, about now, Tanika must be pinching herself to see if she's awake. She's just landed a job with the NRL and started a traineeship in event management last Thursday.

"I was really overwhelmed. It's still like a dream come true," she said. "I just love the whole game."

Covering the story recently The Australian newspaper described it as "a dream job in a league of its own".

It's quite a coup for a girl who has just completed Year 12. She started at Holy Name Primary School, attended St Clares High School in Taree and obtained a scholarship for a private boarding school through the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (AIEF). She spent her last two years at Kincoppal-Rose Bay School of the Sacred Heart.

"I liked school but I wasn't very good at it. I'd rather go and play a sport than be in the classroom."

She's proud she got through and, although homesick at first, she describes the experience as: "amazing".

School and the AIEF opened doors for her, but it was Tanika herself who took advantage of every opportunity presented. She volunteered to help with the opening of her school's multipurpose centre, the Las Vegas fundraiser night, then the Rabbitohs' Green and Red Ball.

Now she'll be involved in all the big NRL events including State of Origin, Indigenous all Stars, Women in League and Heritage Rounds.

"Being an indigenous student definitely opened doors for me. Now I want to be a role model for other indigenous kids to do what they want and try to get their dream job, like me."

Although sports management has always been her goal, the foundation provides one-to-one career case management and encouraged her interest in league and event management. It assisted her in applying for the NRL traineeship, organised her job interview and later, a media interview.

AIEF chief executive Andrew Penfold told The Australian the foundation has 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 transformation tool."

Tanika will work at the NRL in Moore Park, live in Strathfield and undertake a TAFE course in event management.



DREAM JOB: Tanika Perry, who grew up in Forster, has secured the role of trainee in event management with the NRL. She is pictured with her favourite player, Rabbitoh's Nathan Merritt, a member of the Indigenous All Stars.