

52

The Sydney Morning Herald

SportsDay



Cricket Page 44

The intimidator

I'm happy to be the intimidator and to be talked of like that," says Mitchell Johnson in South Africa.



NFL Page 45

Super Seahawks

It took just over 10 seconds for Seattle to set a path that would lead the franchise to their first championship.



Football

Sas

Veteran Sasa the star before

League



On bond: Blake Ferguson leaves the Sutherland Local Court on Monday.
Photo: AAP

Lawyer attacks NRL for not showing mercy to Ferguson

Brad Walter

The lawyer for Blake Ferguson has launched a scathing attack on the NRL for their lack of "mercy" towards the troubled NSW Origin star and questioned what would become of him if he wasn't allowed to resume playing after receiving a two-year good behaviour bond for indecent assault.

Adam Houda, who has lodged an all grounds appeal against the conviction and penalty, admitted Ferguson had a problem with alcohol but said he needed support - not banishment - from the game that had provided a "lifeline" for him after a "harrowing" upbringing by his drug-addicted mother.

With Sydney Roosters, South Sydney, Cronulla and Canterbury believed to be interested in Ferguson, Houda said the 23-year-old would be best served by playing as he would have to train up to seven days a week and be focused on helping his team in games.

"That is his best rehabilitation because that is what Blake does best but right now he is unemployed, he is earning no money and what are you going to do - just leave him to hang

out with undesirables," Houda said.

Ferguson said his main priority was appealing the sentence handed down on Monday in Sutherland Local Court by magistrate Jacqueline Trad, but the former Canberra and Cronulla star told Fairfax Media that he did not know what he would do if he could not return to the NRL.

"Playing footy is what I do and that is my main source of income so if I don't play football I don't do anything," Ferguson said. "They have given chances to a lot more people, I have only had two strikes to my name and I have been condemned for it. It's bullshit. If I train seven days a week I have got something to go to every day so that is one thing that is pretty good for me."

The NRL said it had provided Ferguson with extensive support to assist his rehabilitation.

The program covered alcohol and drug education, sexual ethics, cultural awareness and leadership through to career counselling and development.

"It is disappointing to hear the comments today given the effort the NRL's Education and Welfare team has invested to help Blake

address the issues he has faced," NRL chief operating officer Jim Doyle said. "Our programs have proved successful for the overwhelming majority of players."

Houda outlined details of Ferguson's childhood as he argued that no conviction be recorded, telling the court his parents had separated before he was born and he had lived with his mother, who used drugs and had sex in front of him, until DOCS intervened when he was 13 years old.

"This is only some of the details of the traumatic upbringing of Blake Ferguson," Houda said. With his career in tatters and his reputation "savaged", Houda said Ferguson had been punished enough.

He also took aim at the NRL over a statement issued after Ferguson was found guilty on December 11, in which Doyle said the verdict "would have to be strongly considered" in forming a view whether he was a "fit and proper person to be registered as a player".

"The magistrate made a finding and then moments later they have come out and condemned Blake in the strongest possible terms and indicated they won't be registering

him as a player," Houda said. "There was no careful judgment, no careful consideration; just a very strong punitive response when the welfare of the player should be their paramount consideration."

"They are happy to throw 18-year-old kids into a culture that is embedded in alcohol and drinking and into the world of celebrity where all their actions are heavily scrutinised but when they can't handle the pressure they want to crush them."

"Where is the mercy? The NRL should be putting their arms around Blake, who has had a very, very troubled past and a harrowing childhood. He went to six different schools, he developed post traumatic stress disorder because of his harrowing upbringing and at 18, rugby league presented itself as a lifeline for the kid and he became a star."

"He has given entertainment to lot of people and when things go wrong they want to wash their hands of him. It's not right, this is a kid who has got no prior criminal convictions and he deserves a chance. People should look into his history and work out that it is a miracle he ever got to where he has."