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Rugby league comes of age

Nick Taylor, The West Australian
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Rugby league Tests, World Cup fixtures, the National Rugby League All-Stars game and more NRL premiership matches are on the horizon for Perth - and the WA Rugby League has been told to keep working towards its own NRL side.

Australian Rugby League Commission acting chief executive Shane Mattiske was among the 20,095 spectators at Patersons Stadium on Saturday and saw Manly's remarkable comeback to beat the New Zealand Warriors 24-22 and stay in contention for the finals.

He also had talks with the State Government and the Department of Sport and Recreation about the future of the game in Perth.

"West Australian rugby league is a growth market for the game and we'll continue to invest in it," Mattiske said.

"Saturday's game was a strong sign that we need to continue the focus in terms of television coverage and bringing major rugby league events to Perth.

"Perth is certainly in the frame for major events."

The ARLC expects to announce a new television deal within months that could lead to a further two teams in the 2015 competition.

"The ARL Commission is working through a five-year strategic plan aligned to the broadcast negotiations. At the conclusion we will be able to make an indication in terms of the games expansion," Mattiske said.

"We've been in meetings with the WA Rugby League and clearly communicating that the WA market is important and we are continuing to focus on that.

"They need to allow our planning and negotiations to progress."

WARL chairman Richard Campbell said Saturday's match had been a great advertisement for the game and was pleased with the discussions with Mattiske.

"The turnout demonstrated the support for rugby league in WA," Campbell said.

"The commission is confident that WA rugby league is strong and happy with the structure that we have in place.

"In the immediate future we can expect more NRL games and we can work with that. We are working feverishly in the background, making sure that everything is in place for an announcement."

Manly revived their premiership defence, but second-rower Anthony Watmough faces a nervous wait after being reported for a chicken-wing tackle.

His co-captain Jason King was taken to hospital after suffering a rib injury but the prop was cleared to fly home with the squad.

Warriors five-eighth James Maloney was placed on report for a high hit on Dean Whare.

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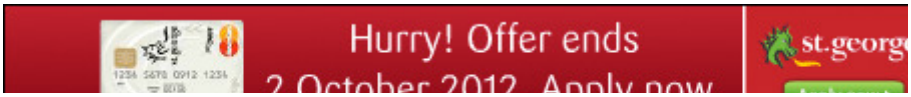

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