

Teacher scores ARL nomination at Kadina

By MICK DALEY

MARK Ippolito, confirmed sports fanatic and head English teacher at Kadina High, has been nominated for the National Teacher of the Year Award by the Australian Rugby League Commission (ARL). A true believer in the importance of sport in education – particularly rugby league – Mark said he was “absolutely thrilled” by the nomination.

“It’s a reward for years of coaching and it’s all down to the fantastic people I work with,” he said.

The award is intended for teachers who’ve “demonstrated exceptional support of rugby league... by integrating league-related teaching material into their programs.”

It provides \$2500 to the winning teacher and a \$500 equipment pack for their school.

Mark certainly meets its philosophical requirements. A teacher for 13 years, he grew up in Bondi Junction, in walking distance of the Rooster’s home ground.

“I’ve seen my share of a million games,” he chuckles.

His early love of the game translated into teaching.

“My first posting was to



Mark Ippolito (far right), with ARL ambassador Mario Fenech, Kadina League Coach Gus Moncrieff on the left and some of the CAKE kids

Walgett. I was there for three years and the real breakthroughs came on the sporting field. I saw that at Cobar and Richmond River too. If you’re coaching a team, you’re halfway there.”

When he came to Kadina High three years ago, the first thing he noticed was that the school had no rugby league teams, “yet every kid had a football in their hands.

“Two former Australian captains, Adam Gilchrist and Craig Foster (in cricket and soccer), came out of this school, so we had that tradition, but it had fallen away. The more footballs I saw around the school, the more I knew I had to do something about it.”

Along with concerned parents, he formed PACE (Parent Community Engagement), whose acronym

has now been swapped for the bigger mouthful of CAKE (Country Rugby League and Kadina Engagement).

“It’s mainly for at-risk Indigenous kids. They respond fantastically to it. One kid I just spoke to has gone from multiple suspensions to only two lately. Anecdotally, attendance has markedly improved.”

The program’s been running for two years, earning the kids NRL accreditation through refereeing and coaching clinics. Once they’ve received accreditation they go into public schools – Goonellabah Public, Lismore Heights Public, Bexhill Public and Clunes Public, where the kids referee and coach younger players.

The ARL sends ambassadors – former Australian players and league stars among them – to give coaching clinics and support. It was through this relationship that ARL development officer Kel Minchin selected Mark as a nominee for the One Community Awards.

The ARL is flying Mark down for the awards, to be held in Sydney at the Town Hall on September 24, fittingly kicking off the 2012 Grand Final Week.

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From P1

had been made to Lismore at the time of the Grafton centre closing.

“This is a dynamic industry and sometimes we have to make decisions like this, painful though they are,” he said.

The Goonellabah jobs are part of a wider cut, with 126 Telstra call centre jobs likely to go in Townsville and a further 180 in Sydney and Melbourne.

“The most relevant factors were that our customer care has increased to the degree that customers need to call us less, bringing about a 20% reduction in the number of callers; at the same time, our online self-service facility has increased and 30% of customers now operate online,” Mr Jamieson said.

“The third reason is that we had an agreement with Foxtel to provide service to their customers through our call centre.

Foxtel has decided to have its own customer service centre,” he added.

As part of the announcement, Mr Jamieson told workers they’ll be invited to look for opportunities across the Telstra network, with support for relocation available from the company.

“It is a very difficult thing to do, and clearly there will be a very heavy impact on people,” he added.

Telstra will now enter into a period of consultations with staff and unions.

“It’s not a foregone conclusion,” Mr Jamieson told *The Echo*.

National lead organiser for the Community and Public Sector Union, Teresa Davison, said there was a chance of saving some jobs if there was a strong campaign against the decision.

“I understand there is no specific end date – the process is due to start in September,” Ms Davison said.

“There are redundancies in Telstra every day, but if your position is made redundant in a big city, there are other jobs in the same building or down the road. In a regional town, there are few other Telstra jobs people can get.

“This will have a devastating effect on families, who may have to move away to find work.

“It’s particularly callous, coming on the back of Telstra’s \$3.42 billion profit in the past year.”

Ms Davison said any campaign against the job cuts would focus on how the company was doing very well, and the staff were experienced, long-term people.

“This is a bad decision for the company, for the staff – it’s not a good business decision.

“Telstra has many customers in the region yet they don’t think twice about ripping these jobs out of the community.”

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