

# Billy Slater cleared to play NRL grand final for Melbourne Storm against Sydney Roosters

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VIDEO: Billy Slater cleared to play in the NRL grand final following his attempted tackle on Sosaia Feki (ABC News)

Billy Slater has been granted the chance of a fairy tale finish to his rugby league career, with the Melbourne Storm great cleared to play in Sunday's NRL grand final after avoiding suspension for a shoulder charge.

MAP: [Sydney 2000](#)

Slater, who will retire after the grand final, was found not guilty of a grade-one charge at a marathon judiciary hearing — lasting close to three hours — held at NRL Central in Sydney, meaning he is available for the Storm for the season decider against the Sydney Roosters at the Olympic stadium.

He had been cited for his attempted tackle on Cronulla's Sosaia Feki [in last Friday night's preliminary final in Melbourne](#).

Slater, who was to return to Melbourne following the hearing, briefly addressed gathered media and expressed his gratitude to the Storm's defence team and the judiciary panel.

"I'd like to thank the judiciary members for a fair hearing," Slater said.

"It was important for me tonight to get my point across and what my intentions were in this incident.

“My preparations for the game starts now. I am grateful for all the support the club has shown me.”

The Storm's legal team had argued Slater was trying to brace for the impact of the collision with Feki and he found himself in what he described to the judiciary panel as a "vulnerable position".



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PHOTO: Billy Slater (R) knocks Sharks winger Sosaia Feki out of play in the preliminary final. (AAP: Hamish Blair)

Slater, who was joined by Storm coach Craig Bellamy at the hearing, claimed he had to protect himself "slightly" with his left shoulder but had always intended to make the tackle by trying to wrap his right arm around Feki.

"I feel the contact that was made was unavoidable," Slater told the judiciary.

Slater's lawyer Nick Ghabar showed still images of the tackle, indicating Slater's right arm made contact with Feki.

NRL counsel Anthony La Surdo, however, argued Slater made no attempt to wrap his arms around Feki in a tackle, using slow motion footage to press his case during his cross-examination.

"That's what you intended to do but that's not what happened," Mr La Surdo said.

"What you intended to do and what you ended up doing are two different things."



PHOTO: Billy Slater (C) arriving at NRL Central for his judiciary hearing alongside Craig Bellamy (R). (AAP: Brendan Esposito)

Mr Ghabar told the judiciary Slater's actions amounted to a "situation where a player did not make a conscious decision to use his shoulder", while labelling it as "not a traditional, if there is a type of thing, shoulder charge".

He said Slater's initial contact in the tackle was made with his pectoral muscle and not his shoulder, and Feki had changed his direction, which meant the contact could not be avoided.

"What else could he have done?" Mr Ghabar asked the judiciary.

The judiciary panel — consisting of retired first-grade players Bob Lindner, Mal Cochrane and Sean Garlick — then found Slater not guilty following its deliberation, lasting almost an hour.

The Slater decision was greeted by a mixed response on social media, with some questioning where the game stands on shoulder charges and others simply glad he was cleared.

**External Link:** @WarrenSmithFOX tweets: Great result for #BillySlater, but I don't know where we now are regarding shoulder charges. The Match Review Committee is back to square one - you can now tuck an arm and contact a ball carrier with your shoulder, with force, and be found not guilty.

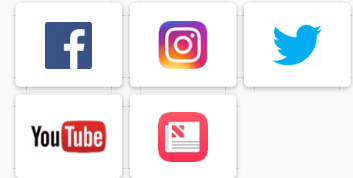
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