



Final Score

MEL	22
CRO	6

Final Score

SYD	12
SOU	4

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The Daily Telegraph
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FREE Billy.

The legend will play on. A three-member judiciary panel last night found retiring Melbourne fullback Billy Slater not guilty at a three-hour judiciary hearing – allowing him to play one final match of rugby league in Sunday’s NRL grand final against Sydney Roosters.

Slater’s stellar career would have been prematurely ended if found guilty last night hearing.

It would have been a cruel exit. Slater fronted the highly-anticipated hearing charged with a grade one shoulder charge on Cronulla's Sosaia Feki in last Friday night's preliminary final in Melbourne.

He pleaded not guilty. The verdict will be an incredible boost for Melbourne Storm, looking to become the first team to win successive titles in united competitions since Brisbane in 1992-1993.

The once-in-a-generation Slater will give Melbourne every chance of success. After the hearing, Slater said: "I'd just like to thank the judiciary members for a fair hearing. It was important for me tonight to get my point across and what my intentions were in this incident.

"Now it's important for me to focus on the game. I haven't started my preparation for the game as yet. That starts as of now. Now it's time to play in the grand final."



Lawyer Nick Ghabar with Melbourne Storm's Billy Slater and Craig Bellamy at Rugby League Central for Slater's NRL judiciary hearing.

Judiciary panel members Bob Lindner, Mal Cochrane and Sean Garlick took 54 dramatic minutes to reach their verdict amid much conjecture from the 75-strong media contingent covering the case. It was the longest deliberation of the past decade but did indicate there was some doubt among the panel.

During evidence, Slater claimed Feki changed direction on his run for the corner, ensuring the collision occurred earlier – around two metres - than expected.

Slater said Feki suddenly changed "his mindset" from wanting to score in the corner to shifting in-field and suddenly running directly at the Storm fullback, left elbow cocked. Claiming to be running at "top speed" – Slater has been clocked at 33 km/hr – the champion fullback said he was put in an awkward body position by Feki's change of direction and made the hit to protect himself and the Cronulla winger from injury. Slater's evidence was forthright, animated and passionate – he virtually ran his own case.

At one point, Slater twice leapt to his feet – with the approval of judiciary chairman Geoff Bellew - to recreate the moment.

He was fighting for a grand final appearance. Storm coach Craig Bellamy attended last night's hearing to support Slater, as did club CEO Dave

Donaghy and director of football, Frank Ponissi. They arrived and left by private jet.

Slater gave evidence to his legal representative, Nick Ghabar, and then under cross examination from NRL counsel, Anthony Lo Surdo.

The panel watched eight different angles of the hit, Ghabar also submitting still frames as evidence.



Melbourne Storm fullback Billy Slater addresses the media after the not guilty verdict. Picture: John Feder/The Australian.

“It was my intention to make a ball and all tackle and get my body between the ball and the tryline,” Slater said in evidence.

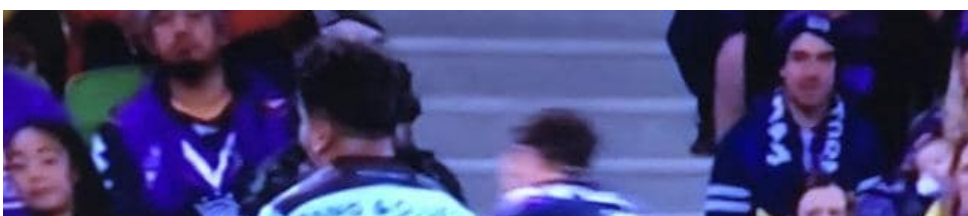
“I was intending to get my body in front of Feki and wrap my arms. I practice this type of stuff at training. “I was going at top speed and he changed, he stepped off his left foot and came square on to me and put me in a vulnerable position. Feki raised his left elbow to my head level. I turned my head and when you turn your head, naturally, your body does too.

“I’ve got a nanosecond to make a decision.

“The collision was two metres before I anticipated. He initiated the contact, there was a definite change in his mindset which created an awkward body position for me.

“My head turned and my body followed. I felt contact to me left pec and jaw. I affected the tackle in the safest manner. It started when he comes off his left foot. “My right arm was wrapping around his left arm, my left arm is wrapping underneath. I turned my head to avoid contact with his elbow.

“I have a duty to get across there for my team. I was put in an awkward body position by him veering back across. I didn’t raise me level.” Lo Surdo argued Slater still committed an offence.





📷 Billy Slater was penalised for a shoulder charge on Sosaia Feki.

“What you intended to do and what you in fact did, were two very different things,” Lo Surdo asked Slater. Slater answered: “Well, yeah.”

Lo Surdo added: “Shoulder charges are illegal and no longer accepted in the game.”

Slater insisted he watched and studied the attacking styles of all opposition players, especially wingers. That, he said, allowed him to know exactly what each player would do with the ball.

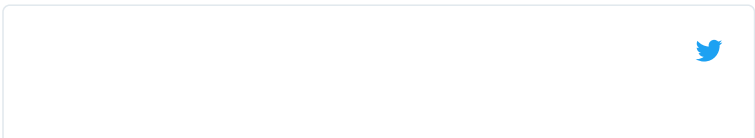
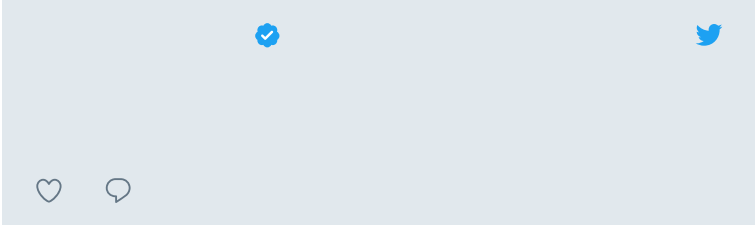
“What foot they step off, what hand they carry the ball in,” Slater said. “That gives me an understanding, knowledge and advantage of what they do. I try to understand patterns in attack.”

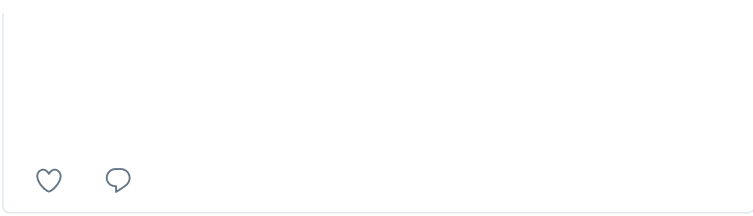
It was because of this that Slater felt Feki would head directly toward the corner to score, as he has on eight occasions this season.

At one point, Bellew asked the media and members of the panel to leave the room to speak with both counsels.

Originally published as [Slater found not guilty, free to play GF](#)







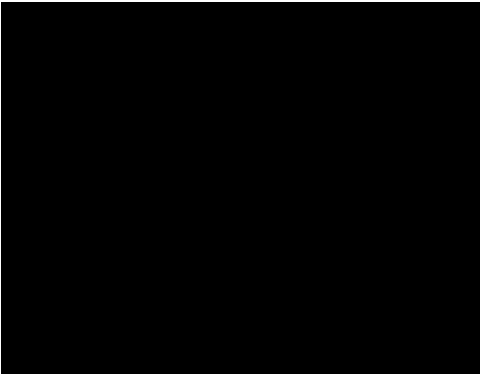
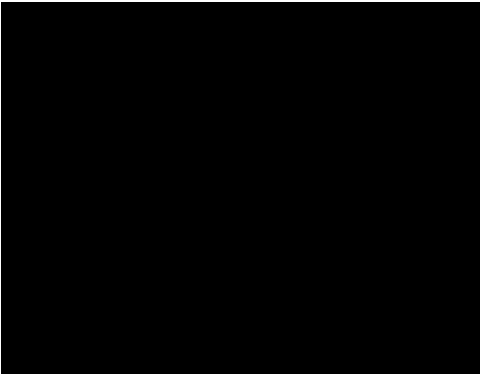
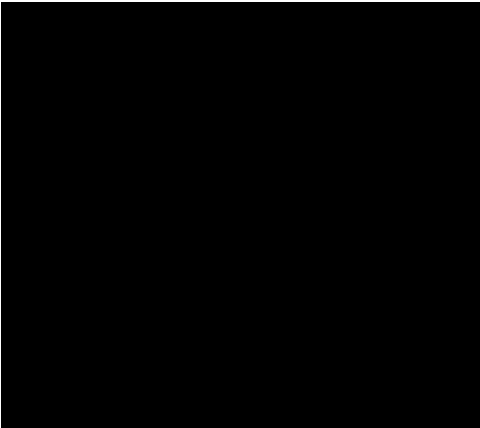
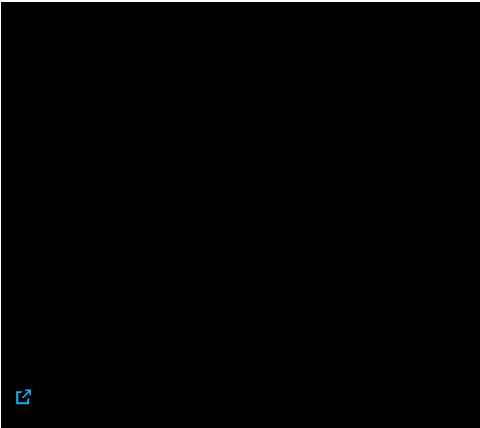
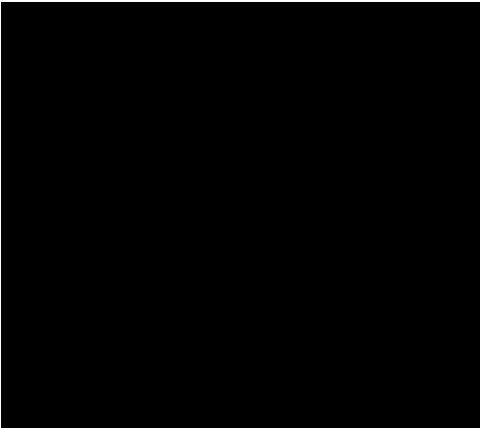
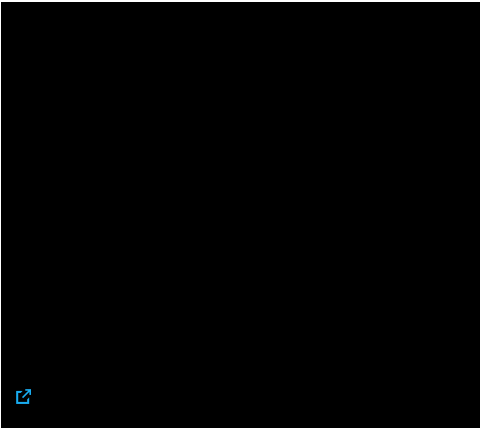
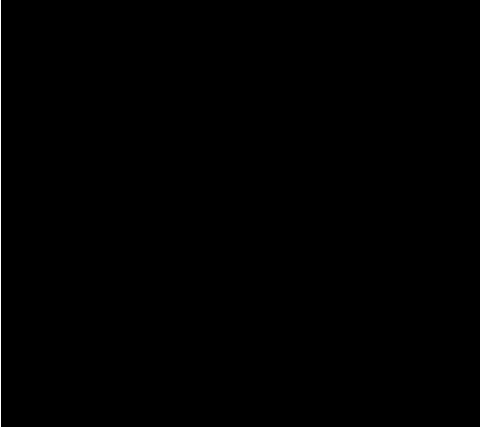
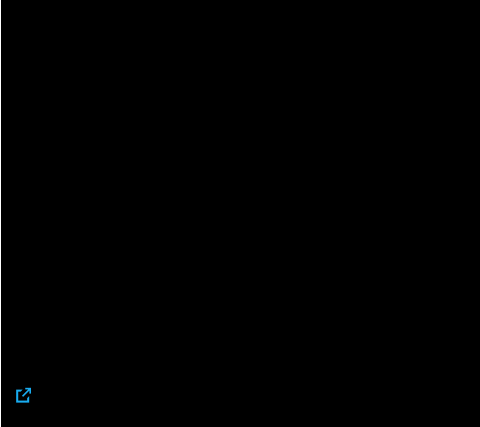


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