

**Benji's now Captain Kiwi**

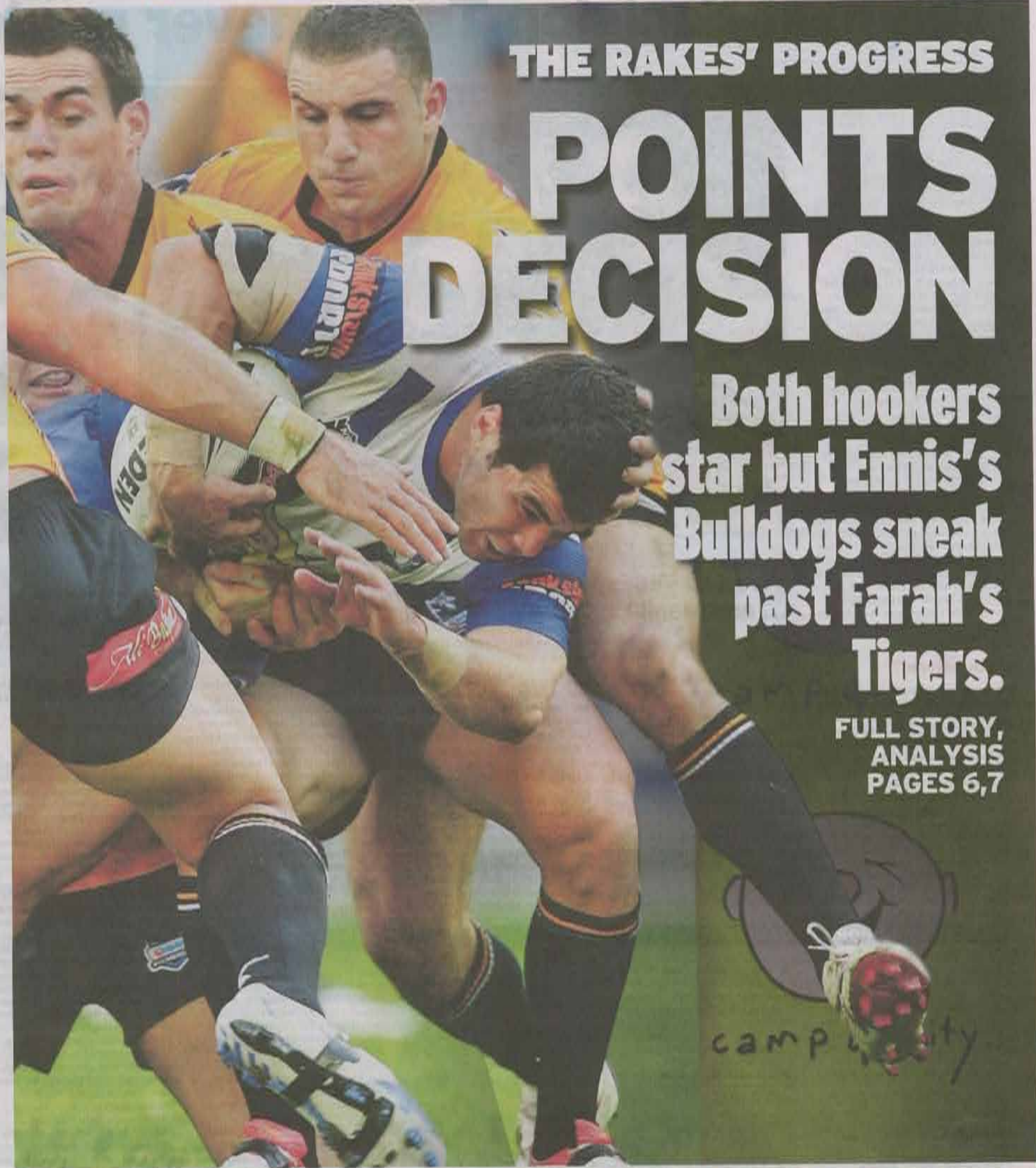
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# Sport

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE

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& NZ TEAMS  
NAMED**  
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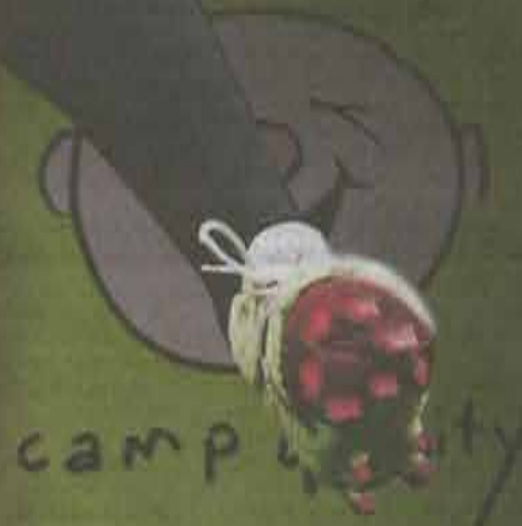


**THE RAKES' PROGRESS**

# POINTS DECISION

**Both hookers  
star but Ennis's  
Bulldogs sneak  
past Farah's  
Tigers.**

**FULL STORY,  
ANALYSIS  
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**INSIDE PYKE MAKES SUCCESSFUL DEBUT AS SWANS BEAT TIGERS - Page 3**

## LEAGUE

## Dogs bully way to the top

## ■ THE MATCH

Bulldogs 22  
Wests Tigers 20

Will Swanton

NOTHING between Michael Ennis and Robbie Farah. A split hair between the Bulldogs and Tigers in a barn-burner.

It's a crying shame Channel Nine hasn't developed a scrum microphone so the sledging war between the two hookers could be heard loud and clear. There *must* have been one. And nothing but kudos to the Bulldogs for squeezing the life out of the Tigers and taking the premiership lead less than a year after the Sonny Bill Williams fiasco. This is one tough club.

Farah versus Ennis was the headline act yesterday. They were superb, combative, Herculean.

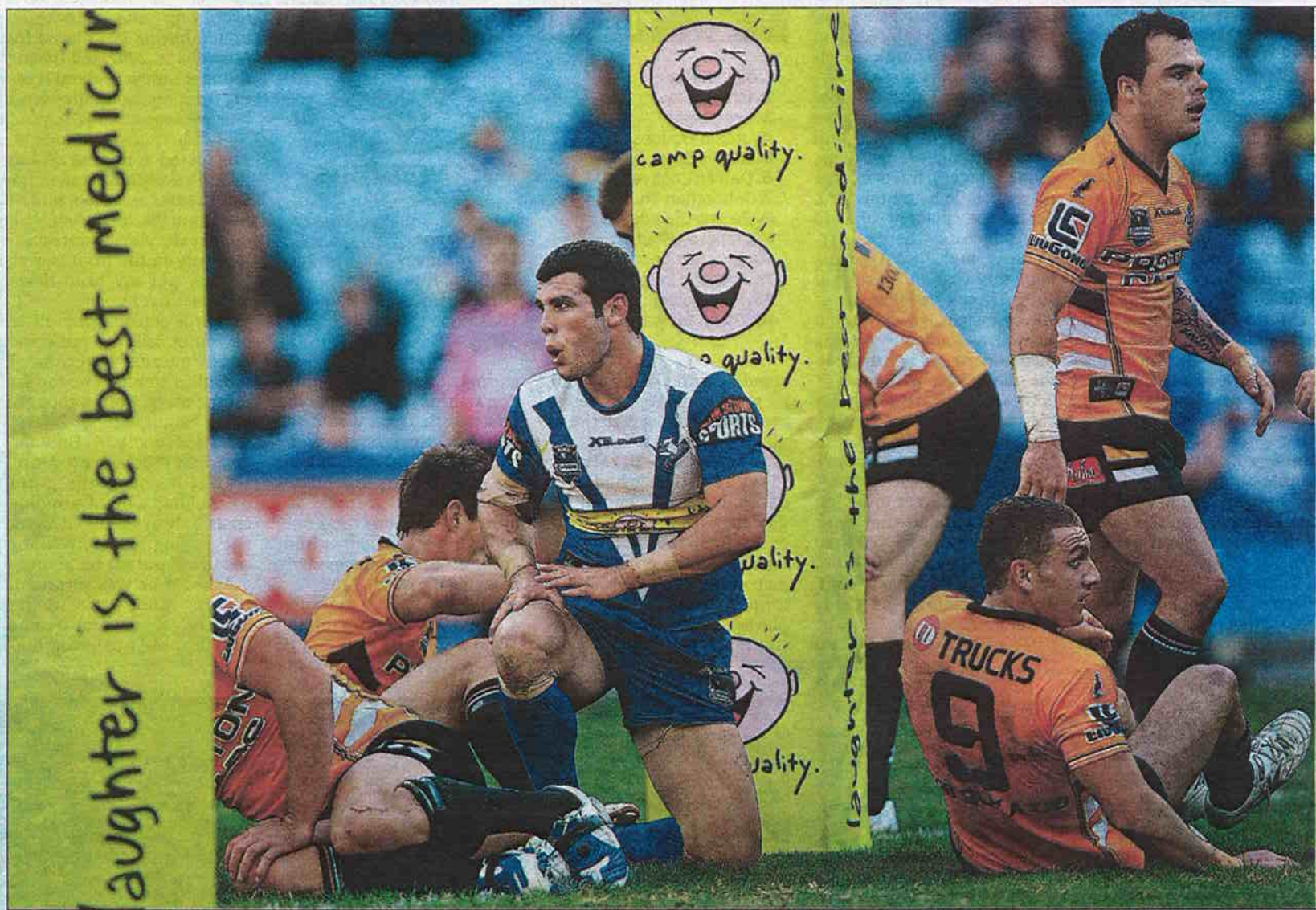
At full-time, Farah was hunched over, dejected, nursing a bruised left eye. Ennis barely had a halt out of place. In no way is the Farah-Ennis debate a selection headache for the Blues. Either way, they're laughing.

Farah went into the game with all the heavyweight support. Danny Buderus, Ben Elias and Marlo Fenech were telling the selectors to pick him. He showed why. The man can play. But so can Ennis, whose renowned toughness was complemented by underappreciated attacking flair. A left-handed pick-up for a crucial try was followed by a Farah-esque grubber for the match-winner. Ennis won a points decision.

Shannon Gallant missed a late conversion for the Tigers that would have sent a genuine thriller into sudden-death. More than 25,000 fans were on their feet throughout.

When Williams said au revoir last year, the Dogs descended into a full-blown crisis. Take a squiz at the latest competition table. He is no longer missed.

Hazem El Masri scored first for the Dogs, planting the ball in the corner. He missed the conversion. When he crossed



Great contest ... Bulldog Michael Ennis after being held up over the try line yesterday. Tigers No.9 Robbie Farah was the man responsible. Photo: Getty Images

in the same corner for his second, after Tigers winger Taniela Tuiaiki had blown a chance to pickpocket possession and run the length of the field for an intercept try, El Masri scampered closer to the posts with the desperation of a man crawling through the desert. He was looking after the goalkicker - himself. His next shot sailed over the black dot. The Dogs led 10-4.

Ennis dived over to score under the posts, grimacing, falling short. When he opened his eyes, the person directly under him was Farah. These are two feisty

individuals. They lock horns again for City and Country on Friday night.

The Dogs nearly ran away with it early. Hulking forward Greg Eastwood gave a great no-look pass to send winger Bryson Goodwin into four-point nirvana. Daryl Millard had offloaded a millisecond before being put on his back.

Eastwood, a big lump with the ball skills of a frustrated halfback, motored left, looked right, passed left and Goodwin did the rest only for video referee Paul Simpkins to rule Andrew Ryan had obstructed Gareth Ellis in defence. The try was disallowed.

Damn rules, they don't take Blair into account. The Tigers levelled proceedings when John Morris and Dean Collis went down the blindside to pave the road for winger Beau Ryan. Gallant added the extras and it was all-square.

Dogs captain Andrew Ryan coughed up possession straight after the break. The biggest lock on the planet, Todd Payten, scored from a Farah pass and Ryan was left standing in the middle of the Olympic Stadium scratching his head. Ennis was behind Farah in their head-to-head stoush at this stage, but not for much longer.

Dogs halfback Brett Kimmorley snuck in a cross-field grubber kick. Ennis hit the ball at pace. With defence in his face, he grabbed the ball with his left hand and scored between the posts. He was mobbed by teammates in blue and white. He didn't even crack a smile. Farah didn't flinch, either, but he must have felt ill. Gallant booted a penalty and it was 16-16 with 20 minutes to go.

It became desperate and scrappy. Field goals came into the equation.

The Tigers dominated possession inside the Bulldogs' red zone but ignored the one-

point option. The Dogs swarmed downfield. Ennis had space. Goodwin was screaming down the sideline. Ennis kicked, Tigers winger Ryan took an air-swing and Goodwin scored with centimetres to spare. Finally, Ennis showed emotion, leaping into Goodwin's arms. Farah was distraught. With three minutes left, Farah grubbered for Ryan to make amends, narrowing the gap to 22-20.

Gallant's conversion missed. The Dogs had won. Farah fell to his haunches.

Both hookers deny they're in a selection war. Rubbish. They're in it up to their ears.