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Barry's NFL punt

Adrian Proszenko, Will Swanton and Daniel Lane | August 10, 2008

Sydney star Barry Hall has been offered the chance to leave the AFL to pursue a career in American football.

The Sun-Herald can reveal Hall met Australian-based National Football League scouts in Sydney and was offered a chance to trial with US clubs in October.

Hall and Swans player development consultant Phil Mullen were spotted in secret talks with OzPunt representatives Paul Shepherd and Arin Tahnasian at the Azure Cafe in the Sydney Football Stadium on Tuesday. The quartet discussed the potential move over coffee while an NFL ball sat on the table.

It is believed Hall will decide this week whether to accept an offer to trial with American clubs Seattle, Arizona, San Francisco and Oakland, while a superstar of the NRL, Israel Folau, said he was also open to any offers from NFL franchises.

"OzPunt approached me through my manager [Mullen] to see if I was interested in what they had to say," Hall told *The Sun-Herald*.

"But the reality is I am contracted to the Swans next year and I intend to fulfil that. While I'll listen to any opportunity for the future, my focus is on the Swans."

Nevertheless, the news the NFL is making a bid for Sydney's most destructive and marketable player will shock Swans fans and officials. Hall, who has also been touted as a potential boxing champion, is contracted to the Swans until the end of next season.

The 31-year-old has been identified as a potential punter, place-kicker or tight-end in the high-stakes world of American football. Tight-ends can earn up to \$3 million a season in the NFL, while punters earn about half that amount.

Dallas Cowboys star Matt McBriar, the highest-paid punter in the game, is also an Australian, while compatriots Ben Graham and Sav Rocca are also big stars in the US.

Sydney-based scout Shepherd said Hall was one of several elite Australian footballers capable of making the transition to the American code.

"We've been approached by some NFL clubs to talk to Barry to see if he's interested in coming over," Shepherd said. "We've been given some names by several NFL clubs interested in rugby league and Aussie Rules stars. We're approaching them quietly to see if they are interested in

coming over."

OzPunt colleague Cameron McGillivray added Hall had the charisma, kicking technique and physical characteristics to be a star in the US.

"A player of his height and weight would be very suited for a tight-end position," he said. "One thing I've noticed with Barry is that he's very deliberate in his kicking technique. He could also be a punter and I see him making that transition quite easily."

Several rugby league stars, including Folau and Parramatta's Krisnan Inu, will also be invited to trials after the Rugby League World Cup in November.

Storm international Folau admitted he, too, was open to NFL offers.

"I'm really interested in trying it out," Folau said. "I want to get over there to see what it's like. If it doesn't work out, well, it doesn't, but I want to see how I go. It would be a massive challenge.

"I've lived in Australia all my life, I was born here, and to change sport and to change countries would be a big challenge for me. I would have to learn the rules and all that, but not many Australians have made it over there as a player instead of just being a kicker. I'm definitely interested in it. It's a pretty impressive sport."

A representative from the Seattle Seahawks, Kevin Griffin, was at Brookvale Oval on Friday night, raving about the skills of Folau as a potential linebacker.

"We need to expand the NFL beyond our borders," he said. "[Folau] has got some fantastic legs for a linebacker. These guys in the NRL, they're big, they're strong, they're fast and they look like they're passionate athletes."



Big punt ... Swans star Barry Hall is in the sights of four NFL clubs and he held talks with gridiron representatives during a secret meeting in Sydney.

Photo: *Andrew Taylor*

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