



Tony Balkin (left) and Shane Bullock have grown up playing rugby league for Narrabeen and play in the preliminary final tomorrow

Picture: SIMON DE

# Grand final would cap lives of league

## JASON AVEDISSIAN

THEY grew up running about Narrabeen High together and inevitably progressed to Lake Park where the hits were a little bit harder.

Rugby league has enveloped the lives of Shane Bullock and Tony Balkin ever since they could lace their own boots.

The pair will team up tomorrow afternoon for Narrabeen in an attempt to end the Sharks' 20-year premiership drought.

Narrabeen play Narraweena in the preliminary final at

Brookvale Oval, with the winner meeting 2006 title favourites Valley United next weekend.

Narrabeen have not won the Manly-Warringah A grade title since 1986, the final season of an epic four-year winning sequence.

That premiership void is now a prime motivator for the Sharks, especially Bullock and Balkin who have played an incredible 52 years of football at Lake Park between them.

"Winning the grand final is the only reason why I'm still playing," Bullock, 33 on Monday, said.

"I was going to retire last year

but then everyone said they were going to stick around so I decided to play on. This will definitely be my last year."

Balkin, who joined the Sharks as a six-year-old in 1978 and said he was "as Narrabeen as they come", is not so sure.

"If we win it, everyone expects me to retire," the 34-year-old roof tiler said.

"I don't know if I want to retire. It's (rugby league) all I know. I've never had a year off since I started."

Bullock joined the club as a kid in 1982 and went on to make his top grade debut nine years later.

He now believes this year is good as any for the Sharks to reach the decider.

"It's been my whole life," Bullock said of playing at Lake Park.

"My kids now play for club. The last two years have basically been the most successful since the late '80s.

"We are in the same boat last year but I think we've got a better side.

"We are more experienced." Kick-off tomorrow is 2.30pm.

The earlier game sees Valley United and Avalon meet in A2 preliminary final from 1

## Eagles aid Roses' Beam team

## Men in blue go forth to