

Footballers pay tribute to cliff fall girl



Tragic: Donnica Clarke

By GREG DANVERS

FOUR days after his daughter was tragically killed in a cliff fall, junior rugby league coach Tony Clarke received an emotional welcome at Brookvale Oval yesterday.

The Central Coast Manly Jersey Flegg coach bravely fronted for his team's scheduled game as players held a minute's silence in memory of Donnica Clarke.

Donnica, 16, slipped and fell 50m to her death while walking between North Avoca and Terrigal on Tuesday night.

"Thank you for the re-

spect that you young men have shown Donnica," an emotional Clarke told his players in the centre of Brookvale Oval.

"It was an effort to come and watch you play. To see you play like that — I'm just so proud of you. You are all dear to my heart."

Manly lost to the Steelers 30-22 but Clarke said he was proud of the respect the team had shown him and his daughter, who had attended some of the teams training sessions and matches with her dad.

"It's the best thing I could have done," Clarke said of being at Brookvale Oval

just three days before his daughter's funeral.

"The boys have shown so much respect for her — they are just such fine young men — they are a credit to their families."

Clarke was training Manly's SG Ball squad when he received the call that is every parent's worst nightmare and he rushed back to the Coast to be with his "angel" but she had died.

Clarke, who coached the Central Coast Rip in their first two seasons of the NSWRL junior representative competitions, made a last minute decision to be at yesterday's game.

He then waited until the full-time siren before walking onto the sideline and gathering with his players and team officials.

Assistant coach Larry McMillan, who stepped into the breach when Clarke was called away, ran the team for the rest of the week. "It was a very hard week to get to today's game," he said.

Team captain Ilija Radan told *The Sunday Telegraph* the team was a close knit bunch and the tragedy had rocked the side.

Donnica's funeral is on Tuesday at the Our Lady of the Sea Catholic Church at Terrigal at 11am.



Proud: Tony Clarke