

Tales from Coathanger City



Ten Years of Tom Brock Lectures

Edited by Richard Cashman
University of Technology, Sydney

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Published by
the Australian Society for Sports History and
the Tom Brock Bequest Committee



Published by the Australian Society for Sports History and the Tom Brock Bequest Committee
Sydney, 2010

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ISBN: 978-0-7334-2899-9

Design and layout: UNSW Design Studio

Printer: Graphitype

Front cover illustration: Grapple tackles have long been part of rugby league. Newtown player Dick Townsend is tackling (or grappling) Wests' centre Peter Burns in the 1918 City Cup Final, which was won by Western Suburbs (Terry Williams).

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Dedication

In memory of Alex Buzo (1944–2006)

2001 Tom Brock lecturer

Thomas George Brock (1929–1997)



Tom Brock in Manchester in October 1985 while on a World Cup tour.

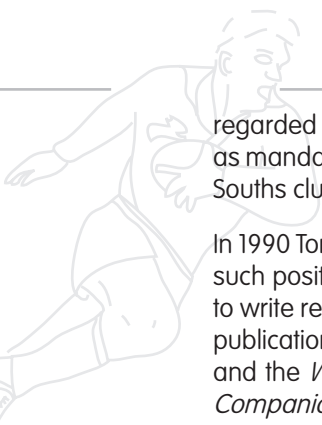
Tom Brock was born on 18 May 1929 in Sydney, the youngest of four children to Sidney (a composer) and Catherine Brock. Tom was educated at St Mary's Cathedral School and Waverley College and remained a member of the 'Old Boys' throughout his life.

During his formative years Tom developed a love of sports and a penchant for writing. Some of his short stories and poetry were published in Sydney's newspapers. Later his two interests coalesced. Tom's early hobbies included philately and short wave radio.

Upon leaving school Tom's first job was as a clerk with a company involved in animal husbandry. Shortly afterwards he joined the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) in a temporary capacity as a clerk in November 1946, achieving a permanent position several months later. Attached to the salaries section of CSIRO, he rose to the position of Personnel (later Human Resources) Manager through dedicated work and relevant professional qualifications gained through additional studies. During this period he enjoyed both his work and numerous lifelong friendships made at and outside work. When he left in September 1985 (formally retiring in July 1987), Tom was presented by his CSIRO colleagues with 'The Concise Brocksford Dictionary', a listing of definitions, all starting with the word 'Brock', compiled by his workmates. The dictionary was a tribute to the affection his colleagues had for him.

Tom lived his life at Maroubra and in the 1940s Maroubra meant rugby league and South Sydney. Tom became a central figure of the unofficial 'Supporters Club' of avid followers that travelled all over Sydney to watch their beloved Rabbitohs play. During the 1950s he began to compile statistical notes of each South Sydney game. Tom's love for the club was infectious and family members were drawn into this supporting network in subsequent decades.

During the 1960s and 1970s the recording of match statistics became an intense preoccupation for Tom. He also expanded his interest in the South Sydney junior ranks, serving on Souths' Schools Committee from 1973. Tom



regarded attendance at junior representative, district and school games as mandatory. It was a way of seeking and suggesting new talent for the Souths club.

In 1990 Tom was appointed Souths' official historian and archivist, the first such position at any New South Wales rugby league club. He continued to write regular match reports and articles that appeared both in Souths' publications as well as local newspapers (including Code 13, *The Rabbitoh* and the *Weekly Southern Courier*). He was a contributor to *The Oxford Companion to Australian Sport*. Tom also found time to collaborate with sports writers and historians, both in Australia and overseas, in the publication of books and articles on rugby league. Tom collaborated with Ian Heads in writing of the official history of Souths, *South Sydney, Pride of the League*, published in 1994—it was his favourite work. In the Author's Note Ian Heads wrote: 'The intricate piecing together of the book represented another magnificent contribution to the Souths' "cause" by rugby league's finest historian, Tom Brock. The task was made so much easier by Tom's tireless efforts in all aspects of its making.' He also contributed to the Australian section of Englishman Trevor Delaney's 1995 book *The International Grounds of Rugby League* and, additionally, was a researcher for the videos *History of South Sydney* and *That's Rugby League*.

In 1994 Tom achieved two honours from the South Sydney Club. He was made a Life Member and was presented with the Spirit of South Sydney Award for outstanding service as an honorary official. He was also recognised by the South Sydney Junior Rugby League Football Club and the New South Wales Rugby League.

In the last ten years of his life Tom was a member of the Australian Society for Sports History (ASSH). He attended the Brisbane conference of the Society in 1995 and helped organise the Sydney branch of ASSH.

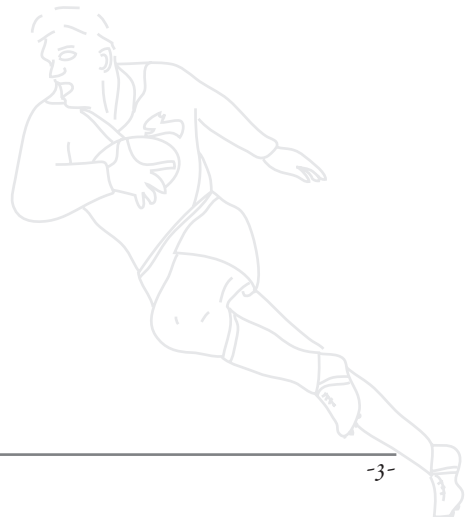
While his forte was rugby league, Tom was keenly interested in a variety of sports including athletics, cricket, rugby union and swimming. Tom attended the Melbourne Olympic Games (1956) and the Commonwealth Games at Christchurch (1974) and Brisbane (1982).

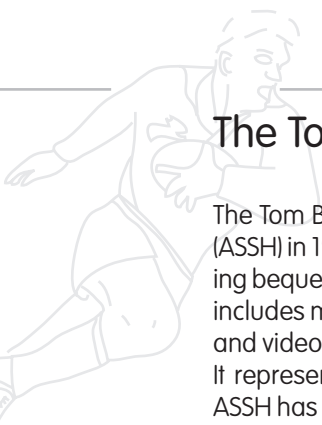
Tom Brock was not a top-notch sportsman. He played rugby league and cricket at school and, subsequently, some social tennis. Tom knew his limitations but was well aware of his 'behind-the-scenes' talents. He used these to the best of his abilities, ever striving to achieve the best for South Sydney, rugby league and sport in general.

The Tom Brock Collection was initially organised by Jennifer Bolton, Master of Information Management-Archives/Records, who produced the first catalogue of the Collection. The Collection was housed at the Library of the University of New South Wales until 2006 when it was moved to the State Library of New South Wales. It is a valuable addition to rugby league and sports history.

Tom Brock died on 28 April 1997 at Maroubra. The Tom Brock Collection, commenced in the 1950s, grew from Tom's love of Souths, rugby league and general sports as well as his thirst for sporting knowledge. It is a testament to a fruitful life, enjoyed to the full. Tom Brock was an unassuming achiever and an obituary described him as 'one of nature's gentlemen'.

Brian McIntyre (assisted by George Franki)





The Tom Brock Bequest

The Tom Brock Bequest, given to the Australian Society for Sports History (ASSH) in 1997, consists of the Tom Brock Collection supported by an ongoing bequest. The collection housed at the State Library of New South Wales, includes manuscript material, newspaper clippings, books, photographs and videos on rugby league in particular and Australian sport in general. It represents the finest collection of rugby league material in Australia. ASSH has appointed a committee to oversee the bequest and to organise appropriate activities in support of the collection from its funds.

Objectives:

1. To maintain the Tom Brock Collection.
2. To organise an annual scholarly lecture on the history of rugby league.
3. To award an annual Tom Brock Scholarship to the value of \$5000.
4. To undertake any other activities which may advance the serious study of rugby league.
5. To publicise the above activities.

Activities:

1. The Tom Brock Lecture.
2. The Tom Brock Scholarship.
3. Updating the Collection with new material on rugby league.
4. Responding to ASSH on an annual basis.

Details of the Tom Brock Bequest and its activities are located on the website of the Australian Society for Sports History: www.sporthistory.org.

Tom Brock Bequest Committee

The Tom Brock Bequest Committee first met on 21 June 1999. Below is a list of people who have contributed to the operations of the TBBC from 1999 to 2010.

<i>Chair:</i>	Braham Dabscheck (1999–2004), Andrew Moore* (2005–)
<i>Executive Officer:</i>	Richard Cashman (1999–)
<i>Secretary:</i>	Andy Carr** (2009–)
<i>Treasurer:</i>	Imke Fischer (1999–)

Rugby league liaison: Terry Williams (2005–)
Representative of the Brock family: Brian McIntyre (1999–)
Past general members: John O'Hara, Kitty O'Brien, Craig Wilson, Kristine Toohey, Sean Bra wley
Current general members: Daryl Adair, M. Kazim

* A member of the TBBC from 2000

** A member of the TBBC from 2007

Tom Brock Scholars, 2000 to 2010

2000 Charles Little, University of New South Wales
'Sport, community and identity in South Sydney: the context of rugby league'

2001 Greg Mallory, Brisbane
'Oral history interviews relating to Brisbane rugby league'

2002 Rollo Manning, Darwin
'The "two rugby's" and the marketing of rugby league to its "publics"'

2004–05 Bill Greenwood, Massey University, New Zealand
'Class, conflict and the clash of codes: The introduction of rugby league football to New Zealand, 1908–21'

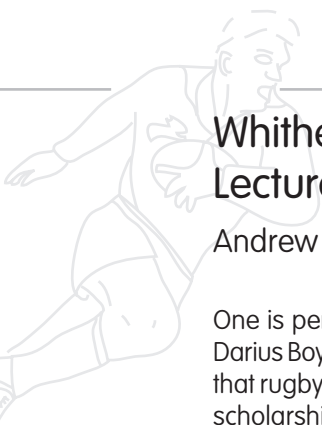
2006 James Connor, Australian National University
'The Rabbitohs' fight for re-instatement: fans, celebrities and lawyers'

2007 Chris Valiotis, University of Newcastle
'The impact of Pacific Islander players on rugby league in Sydney's western suburbs'

2008 Erik Nielsen, University of New South Wales
'George Smith, the Northern Union and the consolidation of amateur traditions'

2009 Katherine Haines, Sydney
'Overview of women's rugby league in New South Wales and Queensland, 1907–93: an examination of the extent and context of women as players'

2010 Mark Falcous, University of Otago, New Zealand
'Policies and people in the marginalization of rugby league in Aotearoa New Zealand 1908–95'



Whither the Squirrel Grip? A Decade of Lectures on the 'Greatest Game of All'

Andrew Moore

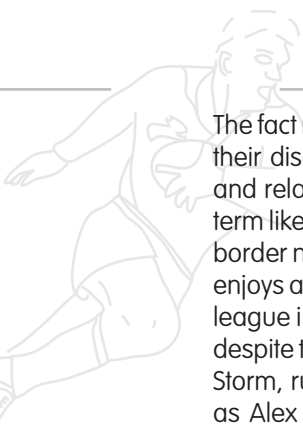
One is periodically reminded—for instance during St George Illawarra's Darius Boyd's infamously monosyllabic press conference in August 2009—that rugby league and the articulate expression of opinion, the essence of scholarship, do not automatically belong in the same sentence. Certainly the working man's code of rugby, formed amidst the dark satanic mills and coal mines of northern England in 1895 and transplanted to the former thief colony of New South Wales 13 years later, is not rocket science. It is a game of strength, speed, passion and commitment, to use a word a former Australian prime minister liked to employ against his rivals, 'ticker'. Though there is great sophistication in its clever use of angles to create gaps, to play it or understand it as a spectator does not require a PhD in philosophy or physics. Two sides of 13 men run at each other, either directly or at angles. One, the side with the football, attempts to create a gap by guile, strength or speed. The defending side resists with varying degrees of tenacity and success. Once a gap is created, it is up to the attacking side to maximise the opportunity and cross the try line or the defending side to thwart them. It is a game of courage and character. After 80 minutes have elapsed, the points are tallied, including goals. The side with the most points wins.

As befits a game of such elegant simplicity, rugby league people often tend to be practical folk with a commonsense, down to earth approach to life and highly developed crapometers. They resist pretentiousness, academic, social, or otherwise. There is a great story about one of rugby league's immortal administrators, Jersey Flegg, a pioneer of 1908 who remained connected to the game for the rest of his life. Born in Bolton, Yorkshire, 'Jerse' never tolerated people 'putting on the dog'. On one occasion Flegg was introduced to a visitor from England, Lord McDonald, by the League's patron, Sir William McKell, a former boilermaker and Labor premier of New South Wales, then governor-general. Not hearing correctly Flegg greeted the English visitor, 'G'day Claude'. McKell corrected him: 'No Jerse, it's Lord, not Claude'. Without breaking stride Flegg retorted scornfully: 'We don't go on with that bulls — here. This is Australia'.¹

Given the much-vaunted Australian anti-intellectualism, it might seem, therefore, that the fundamental project of the Tom Brock Bequest Com-

mittee (TBBC) — to promote a scholarly interest in the history of rugby league — is doomed, or at best problematic. Of course when it suits, rugby league's administrators are keen to promote history and 'heritage'. In 2008 no fewer than 80 centenary functions were planned, as well as 179 plaque-laying ceremonies. On the other hand rugby league administrators and coaches often display a pragmatic attitude to the past. Venerated sayings like 'You're only as good as your last game', betray a certain present-mindedness. Moreover, the concern displayed for historical accuracy by the National Rugby League (NRL) sometimes falls short of acceptable academic standards. In 2008, for instance, the NRL hit upon the idea of naming a medal for Indigenous footballers after a figure from the past, one George Green. It was a commendable, overdue initiative. The only problem was that George Green, a solid hooker forward for Easts and North Sydney in the 1910s and 1920s, was not of Indigenous background. Though born near Grafton in northern New South Wales, he was of Afro-Caribbean descent.² The matter is not one of contention — as Sean Fagan suggests³ — but of documentary evidence (birth certificates) of a case of mistaken identity.

Among a more academic audience, too, there is some evidence of scepticism towards our goals. In 2008 a sub-group of the TBBC was entrusted with the important task of organising the Centenary Conference of Rugby League in Australia, ultimately held at the Powerhouse Museum on 7–8 November 2008. A preliminary call for papers advertised our intention to recognise the 'cultural, historical and social significance in rugby league in Australia from 1908–2008'. One wag who works at the State Library of New South Wales clearly found the suggestion of rugby league having 'cultural, historical and social significance' in for a dig. Alluding to the sordid practice of a player grabbing an opponents genitals in a scrum (in the hope of encouraging a violent response that will, in turn, generate a penalty), he/she offered a paper entitled, 'Whither the squirrel grip: issues of gender, identity and discourse in rugby league 1979–1989'. Though the unknown librarian was probably inferring that rugby league was a base form of popular culture, his or her witticism was accepted in good spirit. In any case taking the mickey in respect of rugby league has a long and proud history. It is significant that the remarkable effusion of wit and satire associated with the antics of 'Rampaging Roy' Slaven and Dr H.G. Nelson over the last 20 years initially sprang from their love of rugby league. It is hard to imagine works like *This is The South Coast News and I'm Paul Murphy* being inspired by a game as dreary as rugby union.⁴ A recent welcome contribution to this rugby league genre is Adrian Prosenko's *The Johnny Larkin Diaries*.⁵ Only Russell Crowe did not find it funny.



The fact remains that two-bob toffs whose class prejudices thinly disguise their disdain for ‘thugby league’ are not unknown in Sydney academia and related circles. In part the problem with recognising the validity of a term like ‘football history’ is a Melbourne versus Sydney thing. South of the border no one would raise any such query. Australian Rules in Melbourne enjoys a maniacal level of support on a cross-class basis denied to rugby league in Sydney and Brisbane (as well as, of course, Melbourne where, despite the undeserved and now rescinded premiership successes of the Storm, rugby league remains largely unnoticed and unloved, confused, as Alex Buzo suggests, with cross-country wrestling.) Even Melbourne University academics like Stuart Macintyre, the prominent Marxist historian and scourge of Australia’s right-wing commentariat, may prefer watching Hawthorn AFL home games rather than attending labour history conferences. There is a booming academic sub-discipline in ‘football studies’ emanating from Victoria University, which of course, being in the western suburbs of Melbourne means ‘aerial ping pong studies’.

For many years — between 1966 and 1978 to be precise — the late, great labour historian Ian Turner delivered an annual ‘Ron Barassi Lecture’ on Australian Rules football. The lecture became an established and well-supported part of grand final week in Melbourne. Wearing his Richmond beanie and often holding a can of beer, as well as a pie and sauce, Turner was always erudite and witty. In many respects the Barassi lecture has been a source of inspiration for the Tom Brock lecture in the Emerald City. As did Ian Turner, we claim the right to be regarded as a legitimate part of football culture and the events that accompany the climax of a football season. Our lecture cannot claim the bulging biceps and plunging necklines of the Dally M Presentation night, nor the testosterone, glamour, excitement and sense of expectation of a grand final breakfast. We assert no moral or intellectual superiority. Nor do we seek to colonise and dominate. We merely wish to be taken seriously as part of the rugby league community.

Established in 1997 under the umbrella the Australian Society for Sports History (ASSH), the TBBC has a number of goals. In large part these reflected the wishes of its generous benefactor Tom Brock, the former historian of the South Sydney Rabbitohs and a working man who loved rugby league. Its primary activities include the delivery of an annual lecture, the award of an annual scholarship and the maintenance of the Tom Brock Collection.

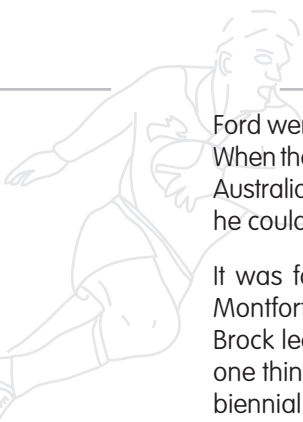
From the beginning the lecture was to be the banner head and focus of the year’s activities. Lecturers — who are paid an honorarium — were sought from three principal constituencies. First, academics and other historians who had some professional engagement with sports history in general

and rugby league in particular. Second, writers, dramatists and playwrights who worked in the cultural sphere generally, but who had some direct association and affinity with rugby league. Third, practitioners of rugby league: journalists, administrators, coaches, perhaps former players, who might reflect upon their experiences in some meaningful way that would inform the present. The success of this interaction was to be gauged not by how all three constituencies were addressed in isolation, but how the lectures blended them together over a period of time. Each year a potential lecturer from one of the areas was selected and then rotated on an annual basis: if an academic was chosen one year, the following year a journalist, or a writer was selected, and so on. Naturally the selected individual was not always available. Still, in ten years the lecturers have been drawn from the three categories in roughly similar proportions: three academics; three cultural sphere people; four practitioners. This informs the TBBC's working premise that rugby league is a broad church. The lectures are brought together here under one cover. What, however, have the lecturers had to say? What was their central thrust?

Academics

The first Tom Brock lecturer in 1999 was Andrew Moore, an academic historian at the University of Western Sydney.⁶ Having recently published *The Mighty Bears! A Social History of North Sydney Rugby League*, a work which sought to blend the social history of a football club with the community to which it belonged, he was a logical enough choice to be first cab off the rank.⁷ In any case in 1999 the book proved surprisingly definitive. With an exquisite sense of timing the Bears chose the night of the lecture to announce that they were placing themselves into voluntary receivership, effectively signalling the demise of a 91-year-old football club from the main premierships competition. (A short-lived merger with Manly and subsequent involvement in the feeder competition, presently known as the NSW Cup, ensued.)⁸

Held at the University of New South Wales on 29 September 1999, Moore used the talisman of Jim Devereux, a pioneer North Sydney player who also spent much of his playing career in Yorkshire, to explore the intersections between eastern Australia and the north of England. In large part the lecture was as much concerned with immigration history as the history of sport. According to Moore, 'Yorkshireness' explained the popularity and longevity of various cultural forms on the eastern seaboard of Australia, among them fish and chips, brass bands and rugby league. Pioneer players and the administrators of the game like Jersey Flegg and Charles H.



Ford were Yorkshire-born. In a sense Australia is a fragment of Yorkshire. When the eminent Australian historian Russel Ward wrote about the 'typical' Australian, anti-authoritarian, independent, hospitable, stoic and sardonic, he could equally have been describing the 'typical' Yorkshireman.

It was four years before another academic, Dr Tony Collins from De Montfort University in Leicester, U.K. was selected to be the fifth Tom Brock lecturer. For the TBBC, The lecture was an especially big deal. For one thing the timing of the lecture was altered to coincide with the 2003 biennial ASSH conference, being held at the North Sydney campus of the Australian Catholic University in July. As well, the lecture was held at an especially glittering venue: the function room of the Mollie Dive Stand at North Sydney Oval, more commonly used for lavish corporate shindigs and promotions. Though the North Sydney Leagues Club shelled out for the drinks, this was a seriously big deal for the fledgling TBBC. Because it was the height of winter and we wanted to showcase the magnificent venue and its immediate environment we even paid extra to have the lights at the oval turned on.

Fortunately the much vaunted 'Curse of the Kalahari' attached to North Sydney Oval did not impede our lecturer. Born in Hull, Yorkshire, more than one listener remarked upon how a northern English accent added to the authority of Dr Collins' address. Using the totemic figure of Harold Wagstaff, the captain of the visiting English Test side in 1914 and later a national coach, Collins sought to demonstrate how Anglo-Australian rugby league culture was formed, the parallels between the sport in the two countries and why the link has proved to be so durable. Having published his seminal study of the 1895 split Collins was already highly regarded as an historian of rugby league. He went on to write several other books, including *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain* and in 2006 became a professor of the social history of sport at Leeds Metropolitan University.⁹

A regular visitor to Australian shores after 2003, Tony wrote to the TBBC to thank us for the opportunity to deliver the Tom Brock lecture. 'As a boy I dreamed of playing for Great Britain against Australia at the SCG', Collins wrote, 'but even at that stage a complete lack of football talent and a total absence of athletic prowess meant this would never be a reality. But giving the lecture has been in many ways a fulfilment of that dream — and I didn't have to share a hotel room with a bunch of drunken adolescent footballers for weeks on end to get the opportunity'.

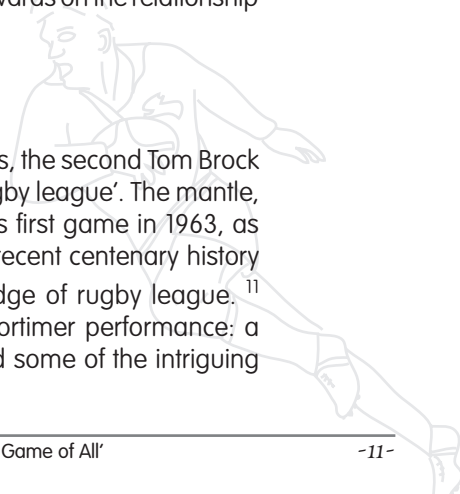
If Tony Collins' lecture on 'our Harold' imparted a warm fuzzy glow, in 2006 the third academic Tom Brock lecturer, Professor David Rowe, was at pains to avoid any semblance of sentimentality and nostalgia. A promi-

nent academic sociologist specialising in issues relating to the media and sport, then recently-appointed director of the Centre for Cultural Research at the University of Western Sydney, Rowe intended to stir the possum. He succeeded admirably. Rowe began by breaking ranks in confessing he was not primarily a rugby league fan. As befits a man who grew up in the south of England, Rowe primarily identified with Association football (aka soccer) and rugby union. Rowe predicted that the rugby league in Australia faced an uncertain future, subordinated to the 'world game', rugby and even Australian Rules. To back up this gloomy prognosis Rowe elaborated upon the legacy of Super League, those unhappy years of 1995–97 when Rupert Murdoch, the New York-based proprietor of News Ltd, successfully took over rugby league. Coupled with ongoing scandals pertaining to player misbehaviour and the game's lack of multi-regional, multi-national appeal, Rowe suggested that rugby league's future was not rosy.

The frisson of disquiet Rowe's lecture created in the course of its delivery was palpable and translated later into some abusive phone calls and emails, as well as a minor dust-up in print between the professor and Daniel Lane, a Fairfax journalist. Among other things Lane wrote that Rowe's lecture was 'negative, and some say poorly researched'. Lane also death rode the lecture by suggesting that the NSW Rugby League might withdraw its support. According to Lane, 'Geoff Carr and Colin Love are entitled to feel put out as they provide the venue, drinks and food.'¹⁰ (Refreshment costs are actually shared by the TBBC and the NSW Rugby League). We would need to look at the videotape replay in greater detail, but it is doubtful whether the judiciary needs to be consulted further. The matter was a storm in a teacup. In any case, as much as the goal of the lecture has been to encourage debate and reflect a diversity of opinion, David Rowe's 2006 address succeeded admirably. 'Skid' Rowe was also provided with some excellent grist to the mill for an in-house seminar that he was to deliver to Fairfax journalists shortly afterwards on the relationship between the media and academics.

Practitioners

It was Roy and H.G. who first described Ian Heads, the second Tom Brock lecturer in 2000, as the 'emeritus professor of rugby league'. The mantle, however, stuck. A journalist who reported on his first game in 1963, as both his classic 1993 work *True Blue* and more recent centenary history suggest, Ian Heads has an unrivalled knowledge of rugby league.¹¹ Describing his lecture as like 'an early Steve Mortimer performance: a bit skittish and all over the place', Heads related some of the intriguing





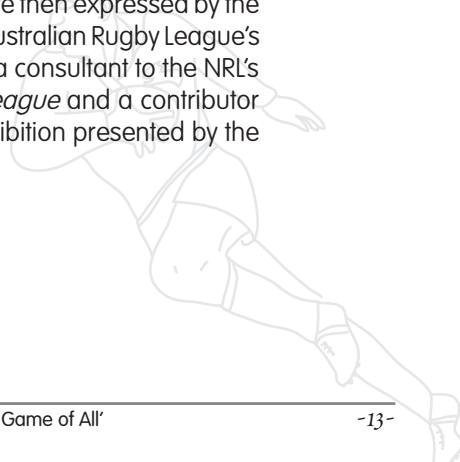
anecdotes that had crossed his desk over the last 45 years. This included explaining the lecture's unusual title. It seems that Harry 'Dealer' Wells, the Western Suburbs centre who partnered Reg Gasnier in the centres for Australia, was fascinated with gang-gang cockatoos, an interest which occasionally distracted him from concentrating on the game. (From a separate source, it might be added that later in life Dealer Wells looked after a farm at Taralga, where the locals did not universally admire his farm management skills. The picturesque southern tablelands town and surrounding district are not short of bird life. Perhaps Dealer was again preoccupied with admiring the cockatoos!)

Heads' lecture was a powerful polemic about the game in the post-Super League era and a lament for the camaraderie that had existed among journalists prior to 1995. He had a particular experience that informed his disaffection. In 1999 Heads had written an article for the *Sunday Telegraph* about the major public rally in support of South Sydney's right to participate in the reformed NRL competition. The article was spiked. As Heads suggests, 'Obviously there was an in-house agenda involved ... not to publicise Souths, and their fight. Right there in flashing lights, I suggest, was the danger of a media organisation "owning" a sport'. Heads resigned from the *Telegraph* and News Limited as a matter of principle.

While the first three lectures had been held at the University of New South Wales, the fourth — from another veteran journalist Alan Clarkson — marked an important departure from the purely academic environment by being held at the South Sydney Leagues Club in Redfern. The venue would have pleased Tom Brock. 'Clarko', also a Rabbitohs fan, was of the same vintage as Ian Heads. Perhaps because he wrote for the quality broadsheet press in Sydney, he was even more significant in popularising the game to a middle-class audience in the 1960s and 1970s. A self-confessed 'blast from the past', Clarkson's lecture consisted largely of a brief autobiographical account of his distinguished career as a sporting journalist. A school mate of Clive Churchill's at Marist Brothers, Hamilton in Newcastle, Clarkson became the chief League writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Sun-Herald* from 1967 to 1989. In common with Heads, Clarko belonged to a journalistic fraternity that enjoyed more congenial relations with the players than is presently the case. An incident in New Zealand in 1969 when players inflicted vigilante justice upon a group of individuals who had been pilfering in the footballers' rooms, unwittingly bashing and injuring a totally innocent party, would now be reported as 'League Thuggery'. Then Clarkson and his colleagues were inclined 'to put a lid on what happened' because 'in those days players had the right to their privacy and what happened on tour stayed there'.

The third journalist who delivered the Tom Brock lecture was Roy Masters. In rugby league circles no word is more debased through over use than 'legend'. If, however, any non-playing rugby league figure of the modern era warrants that title, it is the 'Lidcombe Svengali'. As coach of the Western Suburbs Magpies, Masters engineered the great 'Fibros versus Silvertails' war of the late 1970s. It was a time when Marxist class analysis spread beyond university tutorials and became part of popular discourse. Masters provides a fascinating insider's memoir of the battles between Wests (the 'Fibros') and Manly (the 'Silvertails'), spiced by some valuable interpolations from the other side of the class war. John Gray's memories of having both Dallas Donnelly and 'Sloth' Gibbs lying on him during a game are not pretty. Masters also contributes to the formidable reputation of Greg 'Hollywood' Hartley for partisan refereeing. Masters' great talent lay with motivation. As a proselytiser for Marxism he was significantly less successful. Masters reports that Les Boyd, a central figure in the Magpies' predilection for fisticuffs, is 'a life-long capitalist who now owns half Cootamundra and has only ever voted Liberal'. At the time the pocket battleship Boyd regarded his coach's version of working-class oppression as 'bullshit'. In any case the experience of giving the lecture encouraged Masters to publish another book, *Bad Boys*, which includes some memorable vignettes about many of rugby league's characters.¹² As befits a man from a distinguished literary family, Roy Masters knows how to tell a good story.

If Masters, Clarkson and Heads made their name in print journalism, the fourth Tom Brock journalist, Sean Fagan, definitely belongs to the 21st century and the Internet era. For while Fagan has written several books on the history of rugby league, he is perhaps best known as the webmaster of the respected rugby league web site RL1908.com.¹³ This includes an admirable array of features on the history of the game. In large part Fagan's lecture revisited the circumstances of rugby league's origins and the sanguinary expectations as to the code's future then expressed by the administrators of rugby union. A member of the Australian Rugby League's Centenary History Committee, Sean Fagan was a consultant to the NRL's 2008 documentary series *A Century of Rugby League* and a contributor to 'League of Legends', a travelling museum exhibition presented by the National Museum of Australia in 2008.





Cultural practitioners

Given the connection between education and social class, it remains one of the more interesting facts about rugby league, both in England and Australia, that it is league rather than rugby union which has captured the imagination of the two nations' great writers and playwrights. In England, one thinks immediately of the late Geoffrey Moorhouse (1931–2009). One of the 20th century's truly great wordsmiths, Moorhouse was the author of the centenary history of rugby league in England and *At the George*, a series of essays about rugby league, arguably the best book ever written on the history of any sport.¹⁴ Attending a home game with him between Wigan and St Helens at Central Park on Boxing Day 1991, afterwards enjoying a few pints at Billy Boston's pub over the road, remains one of the highlights of the present writer's sporting life. In Australia, too, intellectuals of the stature of the eminent playwright Alex Buzo and author Tom Keneally, a great friend of Moorhouse, have hitched their wagons to the working-man's code of rugby league.

Both Buzo and Keneally were obvious candidates to deliver the Tom Brock lecture. Buzo's, in 2001, proved to be a bittersweet occasion. Not only was it held shortly after the terrorist attacks in the United States, Alex had recently been diagnosed with the throat cancer to which he would succumb five years later. His brother, Dr Adrian Buzo, read the lecture for him. Oddly this did not seem to matter. Adrian, reading the text beautifully, with appropriate pauses and intonation, Alex standing beside him smiling impishly at his own bon mots, were a great tag team.

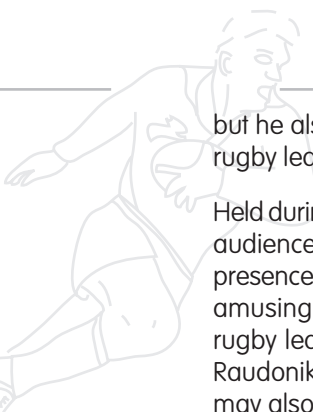
Alex Buzo's purpose was to explore the relationship between the city of Sydney and the code of rugby league. As ever idiom, language and folklore were his primary concerns. Thus while we heard of the exploits of the 'Little Master', Clive Churchill, as we might in any orthodox account of rugby league in the 1950s and 1960s, we also learn that Churchill's ghost-written memoirs are a 'sports classic and an unforgettable social record of Sydney'. Buzo was at pains to explore the stories at the margins of the 'Coathanger Capital' and the argot of everyday life. We are reminded of how keenly contested were the circulation wars between the afternoon newspapers, the *Mirror* and the *Sun*, both using rugby league as a marketing ploy to sell papers. Buzo's story of the newspaper boy at Circular Quay dressed in a South Sydney guernsey, screaming 'Getya Sunamirror here', is an evocative reminder of an era long since past. So too are Buzo's stories of television in the black and white era, of 'Won' Casey and 'Tyrannosaurus Rex' (Mossop), inexplicably exhorting viewers to 'Shut the gate, the horse has bolted'. Words and terms like 'Souse' and 'Freda Ware' are explored

along with other 'pertinent league matters'. As his lecture suggests, Alex Buzo's command of the English language was second to none.

Tom Keneally followed in 2004. Though from a rugby league point of view the distinguished writer carries some baggage, being the No. 1 ticket holder for Manly for instance, in the area of Australian letters and writing, Tom Keneally is the King, the Wally Lewis of the pen. It is doubtful whether Australians fully appreciate the national treasure that lives amongst them. Winning a Booker prize (for *Schindler's Ark* in 1982) makes any sporting award pale into insignificance. His 2004 Tom Brock lecture was a standout. Revisiting the circumstances of rugby league immediately after the Second World War, among other things Keneally recalled the curious practice of dispatching food parcels to a debilitated Great Britain and the extraordinary French rugby league teams of the 1950s. Keneally suggests that the eccentric French fullback Puig-Aubert, who sometimes smoked cigarettes on the field, 'was lucky that the French words nonchalance and flamboyance were available to describe him, for had he been an Australian he would have been called a mug lair'. Keneally concluded by suggesting, 'I believe rugby league has too little a sense of its history, and too little appreciation of the struggle people have made to play it'.

Unsurprisingly, Tom Keneally's lecture was the first of the Tom Brock lectures to generate significant media coverage.¹⁵ It was also the first to be held in Australian rugby league's spiritual home: the premises of the NSW Leagues Club in Phillip Street in central Sydney, an institution founded in 1914. Not only did this mean access to a generous and accommodating space, the Phillip Street venue was also singularly appropriate in terms of its place in the history of the game. If buildings are more than bricks and mortar the ghost of Jersey Flegg, who late in life even lived at the Leagues Club, must surely stalk the premises. If faint echoes of a harmonica can sometimes be heard late at night that must be North Sydney's Harry McKinnon, entertaining other members of the 'Cartel', the NSW Rugby League general committee, after their Monday night meetings. The Tom Brock lectures take their place in the hubbub of informed conversations about rugby league at Phillip Street. The TBBC is enormously grateful for the support of the NSW Rugby League, where the lecture continues to be held.

The final cultural practitioner to have trod the Tom Brock boards in its first ten years was Lex Marinos in 2008. Perhaps more than any other lecturer, Marinos inhabited the parallel universes of rugby league and the arts, having been an around the grounds announcer for ABC Radio as well as an actor, director and writer. For many he would be best remembered for his role on television's 'Kingswood Country' as Ted Bullpit's 'wog' son-in-law,



but he also co-edited one of the more intelligent books published about rugby league in Australia, *League of a Nation*.¹⁶

Held during the 2008 World Cup and therefore to an unusually international audience, the lecture was vintage Marinos. Documenting the immigrant presence in rugby league, it was both informative and, in places, extremely amusing. Marinos included a memoir of interviewing one prominent rugby league player of Lithuanian/Swiss background of the 1970s, Tom Raudonikis. Thanks largely to Roy Masters, the never-say-die halfback may also have established some sort of record of being the code's most written about former player. No one before Lex Marinos, however, had bothered to remark upon his voice. 'Tommy is an aural delight with a voice like he's had a few smokes, a few beers and eaten the bottles', Lex reported wryly. In a similar vein Marinos described Martin Bella, the 1986 North Sydney Kangaroo forward of Italian background, as 'paradoxically named'. In the hands of skilled practitioners like Lex Marinos or Alex Buzo, the English language is as formidable a weapon as a Mario Fenech or Paul Conlon shoulder charge.

Universal themes?

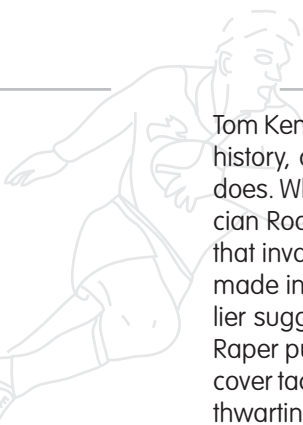
What do the Tom Brock lectures have in common? Apart from their focus on rugby league, clearly they are very diverse. Given that their subject matter was devised by the individual lecturers rather than planned centrally, it is hardly surprising that serendipity rules. Some were empirical; others thematic. Some are festooned with scholarly apparatus — endnotes — others not. Some are principally autobiographical and reflect years of direct experience with the game; others stem from book learning, or research in archives and libraries.

Clearly, however, there are points of commonality. Several focussed on the early years of rugby league in Australia, suggesting perhaps that in both sport and in society foundational myths are always the most seductive. All of them reflect a genuine empathy for rugby league, even if in David Rowe's case this was qualified. That three lecturers, Buzo, Marinos and Moore were/are North Sydney aficionados, goes some way towards reinforcing the no doubt contentious point that the Bears are the thinking person's rugby league team! That all of our lecturers have been male suggests a problem of gender balance. In 2009, however, Katherine Haines was awarded the \$5000 Tom Brock scholarship to work on a project entitled 'An overview of Women's Rugby League 1907–1993 in New South Wales and Queensland'. Katherine was commissioned to write and produce a one-hour radio program for ABC Radio National about women playing

rugby league in Sydney in 1921. This was broadcast in 2009. She is presently enrolled in a PhD at Victoria University. There is hope, in other words, for the future. We have yet to include a former player, though John Fahey who played with the Oaks and Canterbury-Bankstown (as well as being a former premier and federal minister) has agreed to deliver the Tom Brock lecture in 2010. Terry Williams, historian of the Newtown Jets, maintained our high standard in 2009.

Context is everything. As our lectures suggest, the ten years since 1999 have seen rugby league rebuilding after the disasters of Super League. Yet David Rowe is right. To use his arresting phrase, the legacy of Super League 'continues to stalk the code like Banquo's ghost at a Macbeth family dinner'. If in 1999 Andrew Moore announced that recent events had shaken his faith in human nature, he was not alone. Four years after the start of the Super League war, the NRL was concerned by marketing feedback that ordinary fans felt 'detached' from rugby league. No less a personage than Tom Keneally was commissioned to write a poem celebrating the start of the 1999 football season. The NRL marketing director liked the poem so much that he invited 'Thomas' to deliver the poem in its television advertisements, effectively to become the gnostic face of rugby league.¹⁷

Tom Keneally's poem failed to assuage the animosities and saddened hearts of many rugby league followers. As Ian Heads' Tom Brock lecture suggests, the code's master, News Limited, continued upon its neanderthal way. Australians have an instinctive regard for civil liberties and a 'fair go'. As long as South Sydney, the so-called 'Pride of the League', was excluded from the competition and the voice of the people ignored, it was difficult to unreservedly support the Murdoch-run game. As Roy Masters suggests in the 2006 Tom Brock lecture there are still plenty of fans who divide their allegiances between Super League and ARL teams, hoping for non-Super League teams to win at the weekend. In 2010 we are in the unusual, almost ironic position of News Ltd wishing to pull the plug on its costly embrace of rugby league, and this being enthusiastically embraced by the clubs who see it as an opportunity to return the code to 'the people' by establishing an independent commission to run the game. David Rowe's gloomy prognosis for the code, on the other hand, does not seem to be warranted. The fans 'churned' in 1995–1999 have been replaced. In 2009, despite a year when scandals were omnipresent, for the first time rugby league's Australia-wide television ratings eclipsed Australian Rules. In 2009, rugby league had an aggregate audience of 128.5 million across Australia compared with the AFL's 124.3 million.¹⁸



Tom Keneally was right when he pointed out in his Tom Brock lecture that history, or a sense of historical perspective, should matter more than it does. When he opened the 2008 Centenary Conference the former politician Rodney Cavalier made a similar point. Cavalier cited the hyperbole that invariably is attached to a particular tackle Scott Sattler, son of John, made in the 2003 Grand Final. It was a great cover tackle, but as Cavalier suggested, in his heyday 40 years ago every time one John 'Chook' Raper pulled on a guernsey for Newtown or St George, he made several cover tackles of similar courage and determination. Chook's cover tackles thwarting certain tries were taken for granted, a depressing fact of life for all non-St George fans. Scott Sattler's effort needs to be seen in historical context.

That Cavalier could make this point at all, however, suggests that in the face of the great Australian amnesia, history really does matter for some rugby league people. Perhaps it is so for all sports. Nonetheless, historical reference points form part of everyday discourse wherever rugby league is played and talked about. In winter the best parts of 'Grandstand', that superlative ABC radio program on a Sunday afternoon, are invariably before Warren Ryan and his colleagues begin their call of the game, talking about matters that are fundamentally historical. Community histories of rugby league such as Wendy Casey's recent study of the Oberon Tigers continue to be published and show how the game is part of the history of country towns, as well as the suburbs of Sydney and Brisbane.¹⁹

We hope that — seen as whole — the ten Tom Brock lectures and those that follow have some unity and reflect authentic voices about the history of rugby league from people of different work, political, educational and social backgrounds. The TBBC is proud of its contribution. Apart from sponsoring the lectures since 1999, the committee has distributed more than \$45,000 in scholarships to study aspects of the history of rugby league. Several of the beneficiaries are making their mark as scholars of renown. The first Tom Brock scholar, Dr Charles Little, has recently published his history of South Sydney.²⁰ Dr Greg Mallory, the second Tom Brock scholar, has done likewise with an oral history of rugby league in Brisbane.²¹ In an unusual case of exporting coals to Newcastle, his book was launched at the George Hotel in Huddersfield, Yorkshire, where rugby league began in 1895. Greg has also been instrumental in establishing an equivalent annual lecture in Brisbane named after the prominent local radio commentator, George Lovejoy.

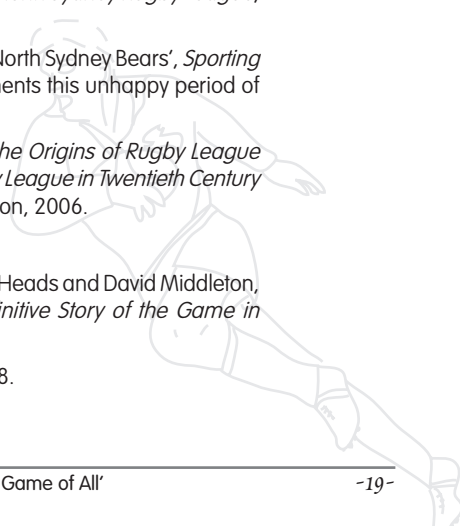
These are welcome developments, as was the number of Tom Brock scholars (six) who presented papers at the Centenary Conference in 2008.

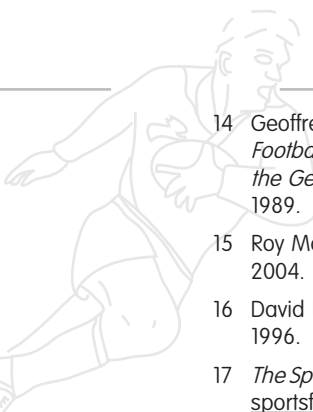
Indeed the cheeky librarian's scepticism mentioned earlier proved unwarranted. All of the conference papers attested to the 'cultural, historical and social significance' of rugby league. So do the Tom Brock lectures which follow here in their chronological order of delivery. The squirrel grip may have withered but, to use an analogy of which Alex Buzo might well have approved, the scholarly study of rugby league is not an oxymoron.

The present volume is dedicated to the memory of that fine playwright, satirist and North Sydney Bears fan, Alex Buzo, struck down in the back play by a late, high tackle in August 2006. The title of this book, *Tales from Coathanger City*, derives from his lecture.

Notes:

- 1 Roy Masters, 'A Hundred Years of League', *Sydney Morning Herald*, (SMH), 26 Aug. 1995. For comments on an earlier draft of this chapter I am grateful to Richard Cashman and Andy Carr.
- 2 Andrew Moore, 'The Wrong Man', *SMH*, 8–9 Nov. 2008.
- 3 <http://www.rl1908.com/History/indigenous.htm> (Accessed 29 Jan. 2010).
- 4 Roy Slaven, *This is the South Coast News and I'm Paul Murphy*, ABC Books, Sydney, 1990; Roy Slaven, *This is the South Coast News and I'm Paul Murphy*, vol. 2, ABC Books, Sydney, 1990.
- 5 Adrian Prosenko, *The Johnny Larkin Diaries: The Cockroach Tells All*, Allen & Unwin, North Sydney, 2009.
- 6 As MC of the various Tom Brock lectures Andrew Moore has often felt obliged to point out he is not THE Andrew Moore, the broadcaster who calls games of rugby league on a Sydney commercial radio station. When THE Andrew Moore was less prominently involved in broadcasting, working as a sideline announcer, more than one UWS student suspected their lecturer was moonlighting on a second job.
- 7 Andrew Moore, *The Mighty Bears! A Social History of North Sydney Rugby League*, Macmillan, Sydney, 1996.
- 8 Andrew Moore, 'Eric Olthwaite and the Demise of the North Sydney Bears', *Sporting Traditions*, May 2010, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 19–36, documents this unhappy period of Norths' history.
- 9 Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*, Frank Cass, London, 1998; Tony Collins, *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain: A Social and Cultural History*, Routledge, London, 2006.
- 10 *Sun-Herald*, 22 Oct. 2006.
- 11 Ian Heads, *True Blue*, Ironbark Press, Sydney, 1992; Ian Heads and David Middleton, *A Centenary of Rugby League 1908–2008: The Definitive Story of the Game in Australia*, Macmillan, Sydney, 2008.
- 12 Roy Masters, *Bad Boys*, Random House, Sydney, 2008.
- 13 <http://www.rl1908.com/>





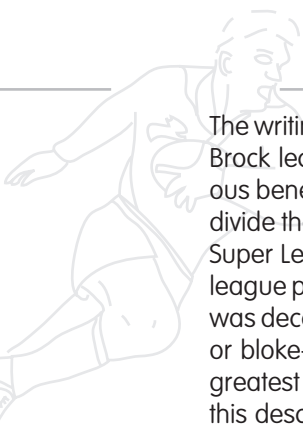
- 14 Geoffrey Moorhouse, *A People's Game: The Centenary History of Rugby League Football 1895–1995*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1995; Geoffrey Moorhouse, *At the George: And Other Essays on Rugby League*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1989.
- 15 Roy Masters, 'Lessons abound in courage and defiance of past', *SMH*, 22 Sept. 2004.
- 16 David Headon and Lex Marinos (eds), *League of a Nation*, ABC Books, Sydney, 1996.
- 17 *The Sports Factor*, ABC Radio, 12 Mar. 1999. <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/sportsf/sstories/sf990312.htm> (Accessed, 10 Apr. 2008.)
- 18 *SMH*, 21 Dec. 2009.
- 19 Wendy Casey, *Tiger Territory: the History of Oberon Rugby League*, privately published, Mudgee, 2009.
- 20 Charles Little, *Through Thick and Thin: The South Sydney Rabbitohs and Their Community*, Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 2009.
- 21 Greg Mallory, *Voices from Brisbane Rugby League: Oral histories from the 50s to the 70s*, privately published, Brisbane, 2009.

Jimmy Devereux's Yorkshire Pudding: Reflections on the Origins of Rugby League in New South Wales and Queensland

29 September 1999, UNSW

Andrew Moore





The writing of this short monograph — stemming from the inaugural Tom Brock lecture in 1999 — caused me to reflect upon the life of its generous benefactor. Thinking about Tom Brock reminds me of a way I used to divide the world, between ‘rugby league people’ and the rest. Before the Super League debacle and its ongoing atrocities and heresies, a ‘rugby league person’ was, at least in my mind, synonymous with someone who was decent, honest, straight up and down, reliable, a no-nonsense bloke or bloke-ette. One lesson of the 1995 ‘Pearl Harbour raid’ was that ‘the greatest game of all’ housed a number of people who imperfectly fitted this description. The likes of Souths’ George Piggins, a genuine people’s hero, were outflanked. Rupert Murdoch did not take over rugby league by himself. Willing accomplices like Peter ‘Swamp Fox’ Moore who led Canterbury-Bankstown into the News Limited camp and lent the rebel competition some credibility proved pivotal.

Tom Brock, however, was the quintessential good bloke and South Sydney supporter. He would have agreed with the wise advice of Mr Mark Carroll, 1999 Souths front row forward, that the foundation clubs, the likes of Souths and North Sydney, Wests and Balmain, and their traditions are vital to rugby league. ‘You can’t lose tradition — it’s like foundations’, ‘Spud’ Carroll advised, ‘you can’t take the foundations out of a house otherwise it’ll fall over’.¹

I used to seek out Tom at book launches and conferences because of our common interests and because I enjoyed his chipper personality. As I write now I can see him adjusting his glasses and smiling. Our discussions invariably resulted in a small pile of photostats arriving by mail, gems of information generously shared. Club loyalty did not enter into the matter. The historians of South Sydney and North Sydney were much more collegiate than rival hookers, George Piggins and Ross Warner, in their playing days!

Tom’s contribution to the historical memory of popular culture in the city of Sydney was a significant one. As an historian Tom was both a hedgehog and a fox. While he would have seen himself primarily as an empiricist, he supported the broader project of scholars within the Australian Society for Sports History of using sport as a vehicle, a window, for making sense of broader themes in Australian social history. Tom would have agreed with Nicholas Fishwick that ‘social historians ought not to feel obliged to describe matches which they never saw or to engage in second-hand discussions of tactics and the like. The point ... is to study what football meant and why it mattered.’²

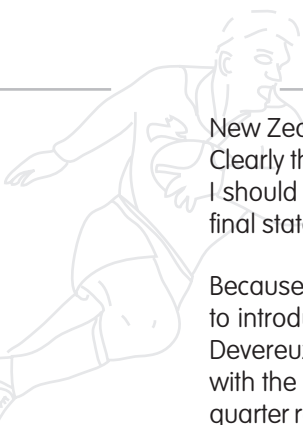
I hope, therefore, that Tom would appreciate my quest here, to locate the origins of rugby league in New South Wales and Queensland, in terms of an argument about the ties of kinship, allegiance and culture between Australia and England, the North of England in particular. Rugby league's English roots were social more than regional. But the game's split with rugby union in 1895 revolved around a north-south axis, such that league became part of both a gritty working-class culture and a more nebulous sense of 'Northern Identity', well described by Jeff Hill and Jack Williams as 'much a state of mind as a place'.³ A recent issue of a London rugby league fanzine, itself an apparent contradiction in terms, casts a sardonic eye on perceptions of rugby league's heartland. 'The North' is projected as

a wild sexy place where strange sports are invented and played by the flat cap wearing-hordes who consume barm cakes and those Wigan mintballs that 'keep you all aglow'. They smoke, drink and swear too much and live in terraced houses with a loft for their pigeons and a kennel for the whippet.⁴

My argument here is that strong bonds were established between Yorkshire and Lancashire, and parts of Cumbria, via rugby league, to the two antipodean rugby league states, New South Wales and Queensland, and especially to regional centres like Newcastle. Even more than that, the 'Yorkshireness' of Australia may help to explain the rather eccentric adoption of the thirteen-a-side code of rugby, about how and why the game put down such solid roots.

In this respect my paper might be seen as a mild rebuke to the historians of Australian immigration who rarely pause to examine regional variations in England, and the differing input, demographic and cultural, of immigrants from the various counties of England. Unthinkable it applied to the Scottish or the Irish, there is a strong tendency to treat England and English migrants as a monolith.⁵

In terms of sports history my paper sets out to examine the extent to which the recent reinterpretation provided by a new book about the origins of rugby league in northern England may help us to understand the start of rugby league in Australia. This is Tony Collins' *Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*.⁶ I hope, too, that this exercise might shed light on one of the more difficult questions of football history. This is why did the workers of New South Wales and Queensland, replicate the rugby league schism which developed in the north of England, when their counterparts elsewhere, in Scotland, Ireland, Wales and



New Zealand and so on, did not, instead remaining true to rugby union? Clearly this is a complex matter. Perhaps, by way of an opening apology, I should point out that what follows is more a preliminary report than a final statement of research findings.

Because the argument has a few twists and turns, it is probably useful to introduce my talisman — the allusion in the title of my paper: ‘Jimmy Devereux’s Yorkshire pudding’. Jim Devereux was a foundation player with the North Sydney District RLFC, a diminutive but brilliant centre three quarter renown for his fancy stepping, born and bred in Crows Nest of Irish immigrant parents and one of the four great local legends that the club produced in its history, now, it seems, sadly a term that can be used in the past tense.⁷ A member of the first Kangaroo tour and the first Australian to score a try in rugby league against Great Britain, his skills probably exceeded those of ‘Dally’ Messenger. The manufacture and transmission of legends, however, embraces issues of power and hegemony. The Eastern Suburbs club and the Messenger family were able to stake Messenger’s claim more energetically and with greater effect, such that Messenger’s name is still commemorated by News Limited and Devereux is largely forgotten.⁸

Because of rugby league Jim Devereux became part of two communities, one a working-class maritime district in North Sydney, the other a much more heavily industrialised port and maritime city in East Yorkshire, Hull. At the conclusion of the first Kangaroo tour, when the promoter J. J. Giltinan ran out of money and some of the Australian tourists had to stay on in England, literally to pay for their passage home, Devereux turned out in black and white for Hull. On Humberside he was again a great success. In his first season he scored 21 tries. When he retired Devereux had scored 101 tries and four goals in 181 games for Hull.⁹ Eighty years later he remained enshrined in folk memory, alongside the remarkable Billy Batten, as a member of Hull’s great 1913-14 cup-winning team.¹⁰

Throughout the 1910s Devereux enjoyed or endured a peripatetic life style, sometimes playing for Hull, other seasons for North Sydney. (The length of time of the sea voyage precluded doing both simultaneously, as would later be common when the English rugby league competition was conducted in the Australian summer.) Sadly, when he reestablished himself back in North Sydney in 1921, from halfback Duncan Thompson to winger Harold Horder, the Shoremen boasted the best club back line in the history of rugby league. So even though he had been a central part of Hull’s championship winning teams of 1920-21, Devereux had to play reserve grade for Norths.

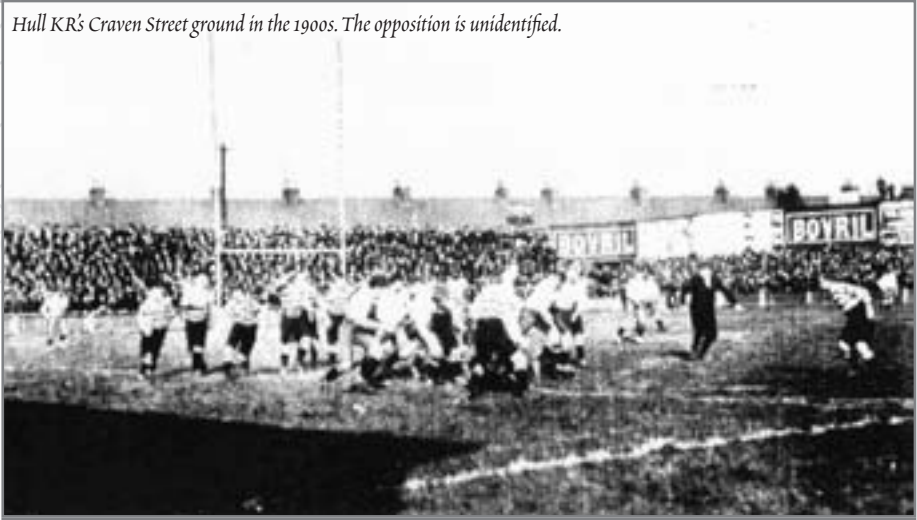
The north of England and Hull remained special for Devereux. On 17 August 1918 he married Daisy Heath, a local Hull girl who returned with him to Australia.¹¹ With other Australians, Sid Deane, Andy Morton and Dinny Campbell, he remembered his days in Hull with great affection. Visiting British rugby league tours occasioned hearty reunions of past and present Hull players. When Harold Bowman visited Australia in 1924 he reported attending 'the long awaited meeting of Hull's former Aussie players' the day after the tourists had defeated New South Wales. The dinner went for five and a half hours and '(a)ll the Australians asked to be remembered to the friends they had made in Hull during their time in England'. Later Bowman spent the day relaxing with Jimmy Devereux at his house. The menu for dinner was perhaps unsurprising given Daisy Devereux's origins — it was Yorkshire Pudding.¹²



In some ways England was kinder to Jim Devereux than his own country. After an unsuccessful period coaching North Sydney, he lost a leg while working at the Milsons Point fabrication sheds as part of the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. During the Depression he fell on hard times and had to be supported by the North Sydney football club. At a rather indeterminate time in the mid-1930s he returned to England, where he died.¹³ Here it is my purpose to follow Jimmy Devereux's fancy steps, to see what we can learn about rugby league's origins in England, and in particular to see what insights can be gleaned from the research of another boy from Hull, Dr Tony Collins.

A more comprehensive account of an argument introduced in several important articles,¹⁴ Tony Collins' recent book, *Rugby's Great Split* is a cautionary tale to all who thought they understood the split which later took place in New South Wales and Queensland between rugby league and rugby union. Collins revisits the so-called 'big bang' theory of rugby league's gestation in Northern England, the mythical, perhaps mythological account of the famous meeting at the George Hotel in Huddersfield in 1895. According to one romantic version of events the split revolved around noble workers standing up for their rights. Demanding 'broken time' and injury compensation payments, the rugby league split was part of a broader challenge by the great and powerful British labour movement to demand industrial democracy at play as well as at work, a gesture towards making the world a fairer place. If it were a film, at this point violins would be playing and the Huddersfield pioneers would be marching off into the sunset with steely resolve and determined jaws.

Hull KR's Craven Street ground in the 1900s. The opposition is unidentified.



This is the way we might like to remember the rugby split in 1895; unfortunately it is not true. Dr Collins shows us that rather than being a brave challenge from below, the rugby league split in England was more a preemptive strike from above. It was the culmination of a long campaign by members of the British Rugby Union hierarchy to rid themselves of the pesky workers from the north who had increasingly taken over their game. The George Hotel meeting was, therefore, less a strike by the workers than a response to a lockout. There was no sudden determination to introduce 'payment' or 'broken time payment'. The Rugby Football Union brought on the dispute, behaved like bullies, conducted purges of waverers, and effectively challenged the northerners to respond. Ultimately they did, epitomised by the George Hotel meeting, though the stand quickly proved a Pyrrhic victory. In England, the early 1900s saw the ineluctable rise in the fortunes of soccer. Rugby league was marginalised to a few industrial towns in the Manchester concubation, Leeds and the West Yorkshire coal fields, a narrow corridor of support now defined by the M62 motor way. I am reminded that Claude Greengrass, that loveable rogue of television's *Heartbeat*, periodically acts as a scout for the Wigan Rugby League Club, while the green, enchanting expanses of the Yorkshire dales and moors remain solid rugby union and Range Rover territory.

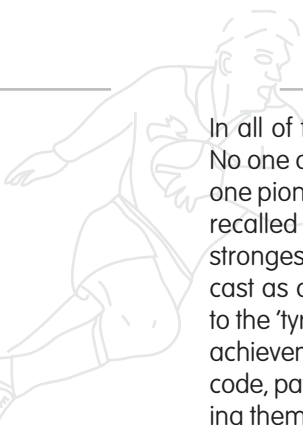
Given the problems Dr Collins has numerated in the legends that surrounded the George Hotel meeting, it is disconcerting, therefore, to note the existence of a parallel and similarly unchallenged mantra about the origins of rugby league in Australia. This unites the cadres of the New South Wales Rugby League when they first commemorated the feats of the game's pioneers,¹⁵ through to more contemporary News Limited

propaganda which venerates the game's traditions while simultaneously destroying them.¹⁶ The orthodox view also embraces distinctly reputable sources such as the New South Wales Rugby League's official historian, 'Associate Professor' Ian Heads,¹⁷ as well as academic scholars of the calibre of Chris Cunneen, Murray Phillips and George Parsons.¹⁸

This oft-told story begins with the impending visit to Australia from New Zealand of A. H. Baskerville's so-called 'All Golds' in 1907, on their way to play in northern England, looking for someone to play.¹⁹ It meanders through a series of sepia images of candle light secret meetings in Victor Trumper Sports Store and the founding meeting of the New South Wales Rugby League at Bateman's Crystal Hotel, on the cold and windy night of 8 August 1907. The injury suffered by Glebe rugby union player, Alex Burdon, so grievously ignored by the rugby union hierarchy provided an 'emotional push towards establishing the new game'.²⁰ While spending a large amount of money on their ground in Forest Lodge, it was clear that these bosses did not give a fig about the rank and file. So, prompted by entrepreneurial types like Giltinan, the brave workers stood up for themselves, seized the initiative and formed the New South Wales Rugby League.



Hull KR v Hull at Hull KR's Craven Street ground, 22.3.1902. Hull won this second round Challenge Cup tie 10-5.



In all of these accounts there is no suggestion of a lockout by the elite. No one of course pretended that the process was easy. In 1958 S. G. Ball, one pioneer and then chairman of the League's management committee recalled 'that the Pioneers started the game going ... in the face of the strongest possible opposition'. Yet, by and large the rugby league split is cast as a heroic response by the battlers, albeit a politically muted one, to the 'tyrannies of the Establishment'. Comparisons were drawn with the achievement of the Eight Hour Day. The formation of a 'professional' rugby code, paying players for time lost while training or playing, and compensating them for injury, was part of a project for promoting 'humanitarianism' and 'democracy' in sport.²¹ While working men had increasingly dominated rugby union from the 1880s, and the sense of exclusion from above that directed events at Huddersfield was echoed in some sports in Australia — rowing for instance²² — there was little indication that the Australian ruggar fraternity was keen to see the proletarians go, as were their British counterparts. More than likely the oft-cited remarks of one astute observer, H. M. Moran, a rugby union player at Sydney University, reflect the establishment's dismay at losing much of the strength and vitality from their game. Moran lamented:

For the students of Sydney University the establishment of professionalism in sport meant serious loss. In my time the undergraduates were in danger of all being stamped into a single mould. They were being given one uniform pattern in their prejudices and preferences. Sport provided an extra-mural course in a totally different discipline. We tussled with factory hands and firemen, with miners, wharf-labourers and carters. These players might have rougher manners, but in many of the elementary virtues of life they were our superiors. Above all they had a hard edge to their characters, and a robusiter humour. By contact with them we gained immeasurably more than they. When professionalism came, University players were shut out from friendships with men in ranks called lower and their education suffered by it. Whatever polite scholarship they might possess they now were sentenced to be weaker in humanity.²³

Tony Collins' book deserves its considerable reputation, freely bestowed at the scholarly end of the Australian rugby league spectrum, but it is less helpful in explaining the basis of rugby league's antipodean popularity. Collins argues: 'Given the lower levels of social deference and the ostensibly more democratic norms of Australian society (at least for whites), it was clear that the imposition of the amateur ethos could not last'.²⁴ Elsewhere

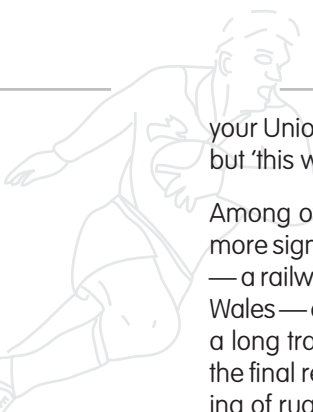
he writes 'In Australia, the social strictures of amateurism were largely incompatible with the organisation of daily life ...'²⁵

Both assertions are debatable, especially the second. While class distinctions were less underpinned with caste-like rigidity, both claims smack of a 'Godzone' workers paradise ideology of early twentieth century Australia which few historians would now share.²⁶ Nonetheless, it is probably true that the strong roots established by rugby league in New South Wales and Queensland are partly attributable to the game's links with a powerful labour movement.²⁷ In world terms it was unusual for rugby league to share its major venue with the game more loved by the establishment, cricket, but this happened in Sydney as well as in Leeds. Rugby union became the minority game, retreating to the suburbs of the wealthy, a rite of passage for private school boys on their way to careers in business or the professions. Thus, for much of the twentieth century, for most people engaged in the popular culture of Australia's most populous city, Sydney, as well as in Brisbane and their related rural hinterlands, the word 'football' meant rugby league, a feat never accomplished even in Northern England. The game shaped sporting culture and community life. Its clubs created tribal loyalties. All of this is, of course, now very ancient history in the brave new world of franchises, moveable assets and merged identities.

The English sources do provide us with insights about the establishment of rugby league in New South Wales. It is instructive, for instance, to note that the standard bearer of the news of professional rugby's establishment in New South Wales was not J. J. Giltinan, but the Wellington postal worker, A. H. Baskerville. Published in the *Yorkshire Post* on 24 September 1907, a letter from Baskerville informed Joe Platt of the Northern Union that the formation of rugby league in Sydney had been a 'great sensation'. 'The intention is not to pay actual wages', Baskerville wrote, 'but to pay for broken time, to pay all ... out of pocket expenses when away from home, and to provide an ample insurance scheme in case of accident'. Players connected with the rebel league who had been threatened with a 'loss of billel' would be looked after. Already, Baskerville claimed that 'Most of the footballers in Bathurst are in sympathy with the professional movement in Sydney'. Baskerville conceded that rather than splitting with the New South Wales Rugby Union, many footballers would prefer that it changed its policies.

On 2 October 1907 the *Yorkshire Post* published a letter from Giltinan to Platt, announcing the general intention to form the breakaway rugby league. Apart from requesting the despatch of 50 rule books and instructions Giltinan tentatively broached the prospect of international connections. 'Perhaps it is a bit premature to ask you to invite our League to play





your Union a series of matches in your country', Giltinan tentatively wrote, but 'this would assist League in NSW'.²⁸

Among other things this suggests that the ill-fated Baskerville was even more significant than hitherto has been allowed. The reference to Bathurst — a railway town and rural service centre in the central west of New South Wales — as a cradle of rugby league is curious.²⁹ Nonetheless, and despite a long tradition of 'shamateurism' in Australian rugby union, perhaps in the final resort such evidence does not upturn the traditional understanding of rugby league's origins in Australia. As time went on rugby union's cadres were increasingly unwilling to put rugby's Humpty Dumpty back together again, but they did not induce the split of 1907-08. By and large, the antipodean split should remain cast as a strike by the workers rather than a lockout by the bosses. Moreover, the Australian split seems to have taken place in more or less complete isolation from events in England, neither anticipated nor brought on by the Northern Union and indeed taking them by surprise. As Tony Collins writes: 'One can only imagine the reaction of the marginalised and embattled Northern Union to the events which were unfolding around the world. Much to their surprise, they now found themselves at the head of a worldwide rugby revolution'.³⁰

Here I need to return to Jimmy Devereux's Yorkshire pudding and in the process raise a further dimension — perhaps more of a tentative hypothesis — about traditional explanations as to why and how rugby league became so entrenched in the eastern states of Australia. This focusses on the strong bonds between 'Northern Identity' and the labourist world view of Australian workers, the commonalties of experience and ties of kinship which existed with Yorkshire and Lancashire in particular. One eminent rugby league and labour person, Dr H. V. Evatt, understood this when, as Australian Minister for External Affairs, he diverted to Leeds in 1945 to canvass support for the immediate recommencement of 'inter-colonial' rugby league Test matches between Britain and Australia. Evatt knew that the return to post-war normalcy in diplomatic affairs would be hastened by reviving international rugby league contests. An historian of note, Evatt also understood that the histories of the former colonies were inextricably tied to the north of England, in part by rugby league. Indeed the minutes of the Rugby Football League specifically recorded that '(t)he close relationships that have been built up between Australia and N.Z. and the North of England is in the nature of a history, and the building of this history ought to be resumed as soon as possible in the best interests of Rugby League Football, and of the Empire'.³¹

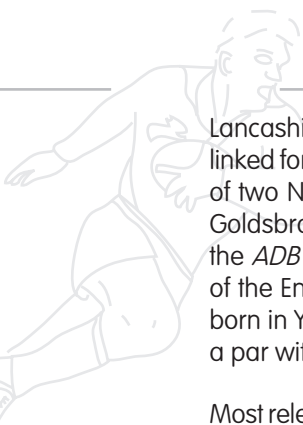
Pigskin was of course only one medium of this cultural exchange, at whose economic base was the wool industry. Since the days of John Macarthur,

the Australian colonies had been part of an international division of labour whereby the Australian colonies provided wool to Yorkshire's textile mills. The Lord Mayor of Bradford, J. E. Fawcett, articulated this well when, in October 1908, he welcomed the first Kangaroo tourists to his city. Apart from expressing 'his pleasure at meeting such a fine lot of colonials', Lord Mayor Fawcett alluded to the long history of interaction between Bradford and Australia via the wool trade.³²

While most historians would acknowledge the importance of British models to Australian sport, none have ventured further into the complicated terrain of regional variations and their differing input. A similar lacunae exists in studies of Australian immigration. Only James Jupp's *The Australian People*, easily one of the most useful books ever published about Australia, alerts readers to the rich tapestry of regional variations within England which shaped the experience of immigration. The cultural specificities of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and the north of England generally influenced Australian society considerably. The two most obvious forms of cultural inheritance were fish and chips (reputedly invented in Oldham, Lancashire in 1861, temporarily discredited as a cultural form in Australia because of an association with Pauline Hanson) and rugby league.³³

In Australia the Irish are rightfully regarded as a founding and forming people. But the same holds true for northerners. After all, that farm boy from Great Ayton and denizen of Whitby, Yorkshire, James Cook, the navigator and mariner, carved out a considerable niche for himself in relation to Australia in 1770 and 1772. Because it was the northern textile towns that experienced the full force of the traumatic level of disruption associated with the Industrial Revolution, the antipodean convicts contained a strong northern component, none more so than the First Fleet.³⁴ Yorkshiremen participated in the full spectrum of activities in early colonial New South Wales. The Methodist religious revival of the 1760s, which swept through places like Farsley, Yorkshire played a formative role in shaping the demons which exercised the mind of the Reverend Samuel Marsden, sectarian bigot, magistrate at Parramatta and congenital hater of the Irish. Conversely, numbered among the Irish rebels who stormed the antipodean Bastille at Castle Hill in March 1804 was a Yorkshireman, John Place, who had, hitherto, evinced no background of interest in republicanism or political militancy.³⁵

In a more respectable vein, the pages of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)* are strewn with northerners, eloquent testimony as to their manifest contributions in many spheres of activities, in business especially, but also in the professions, the arts and politics. Thus the early premier of New South Wales, 'Slippery Charlie' Cowper was from



Lancashire. Australia's largest wool broking business, Goldsbrough Mort, linked for more than a century to Bradford, resulted from the collaboration of two Northerners, Thomas Mort from Bolton, Lancashire, and Richard Goldsbrough from near Bradford, Yorkshire. In the first twelve volumes of the *ADB* while those from Middlesex and London are the largest group of the English born (at 197 and 375 respectively), next highest are those born in Yorkshire (150) and Lancashire (135), while Cumberland's 31 is on a par with counties like Derbyshire.³⁶

Most relevant to this inquiry about the social origins of rugby league in New South Wales and Queensland are the waves of assisted migration, which took place after 1875, ended abruptly by the 1890s Depression. Between 1876 and 1879 Northerners made up over 18 per cent of assisted migrants to Queensland. They included 859 from Lancashire and 819 from Durham, the largest totals for any county of origin in Britain or Ireland. Especially dramatic was the assisted migration of 10,524 Northerners to New South Wales between 1877 and 1887. These included 3379 from Yorkshire, and 2528 from Lancashire. Because of the downturn in local industry, a sizeable proportion of these migrants were coal miners and indeed many were bound for Newcastle where the coal industry was expanding. Mass



East Riding v West Riding invitation match in aid of Steve Darmody (who had a foot blown off in Flanders), the Boulevard, 6.6.1916

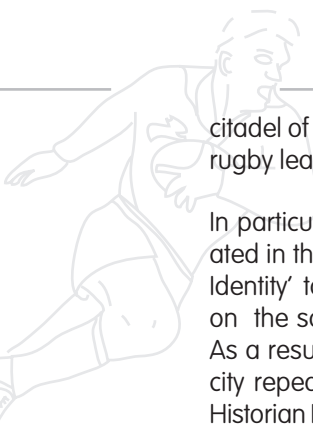
Darmody is the one on crutches and the player on his right is Harold Wagstaff. Australian sprinter Jack Donaldson is next to Wagstaff. Billy Batten is crouching in front of Donaldson; to his right is Jonty Parkin and on Batten's left is former Easts player Albert Rosenfeld. Wagstaff, Batten, Parkin and Rosenfeld were all foundation members of the RFL Hall of Fame.



Hull's 1921 Championship-winning side — Jimmy Devereux is sitting on the bench, fourth from our right next to the Championship Trophy

emigration from Yorkshire, Lancashire and Durham was at its peak in Queensland between 1883 and 1885.³⁷

Of the political impresse of this pattern of emigration Dr Jupp concludes: 'It can hardly be coincidental that these large migrations from northern England were followed immediately by the formation of strong Labor parties in the two colonies most effected'.³⁸ Prominent northern socialists who made their mark in New South Wales included Percy Brookfield, the legendary leader of the Broken Hill miners³⁹ and John Simpson Kirkpatrick, more widely remembered as the homeric ambulance man of the First World War, than for his commitment to class-war politics.⁴⁰ By 1891 nine of the ALP MP's elected to parliament in New South Wales hailed from the North of England. One of Australia's more notorious 'Red Csars' of the Cold War period, trade union leader Ernie Thornton of the Federated Ironworkers' Association (FIA), was born in rugby league's English birthplace, Huddersfield,⁴¹ while at the other end of the scale of political radicalism within the FIA, John Ducker, that archetypal New South Wales ALP 'numbers man', emigrated from Hull with his parents aged eighteen.⁴² Rugby league centres such as Bradford where the Independent Labour Party was formed in 1893, or Fetherstone, the focus of the 1893 miners' strike where two miners were shot dead and sixteen more wounded, behaved very similarly to epicentres of labour militancy in New South Wales and Queensland. Such places as Balmain, the working-class suburb where the first branch of the ALP was formed in 1891, and Newcastle, in the 1890s a



citadel of Australian anarchism and free thought, proved to be important rugby league centres.⁴³

In particular, Newcastle became the apogee of an antipodean city created in the north of England mould, similar in its transplanted 'Northern Identity' to the uprooted 'Irishness' so evident in places like Yass-Galong, on the southern highlands of New South Wales, or Koroit in Victoria.⁴⁴ As a result in Newcastle, not only was Methodism pronounced, but the city repeated the English trope associated with the North-South divide. Historian Nancy Cushing reports that even the meagre distance separating Sydney and Newcastle (60 nautical miles north) allowed the 'perceived cultural, economic and social divide between north and south in England to be replicated'. Cushing claims:

In Great Britain, the northern metaphor stands for pragmatism, empiricism, calculation and puritanism while the southern metaphor suggests romanticism, Anglicanism, aristocracy and belief in superior nature rather than superior effort. In New South Wales, the northern metaphor was applied to Newcastle while the southern metaphor was appropriated by Sydney. Newcastle became a separate place, the gateway to the north of the coalfields, the 'Land of the Working Class' and peripherality, while Sydney was further entrenched as the new London, the metropolis and the centre.⁴⁵

Such distinctions were reinforced by patterns of popular culture in Newcastle. In the 1880s, for instance, rather than following Sydney's taste for rugby union, Australian Rules was the dominant football code in the regional city. As Ellen McEwen points out, in part this reflected patterns of internal migration within Australia whereby miners from Victoria had relocated to Newcastle, bringing their football allegiances with them. Also, given that the friendly societies that criss-crossed the Hunter would not pay compensation for injuries sustained while playing sport and miners had to be hail and hearty in order to work, the clear preference of wage labourers was for a safer game of football. The same imperative assisted soccer's rise to popularity in Newcastle in the 1890s.⁴⁶

In essence, here was a community on hold — waiting for a safer version of rugby — one that eschewed the dangerous practice of the maul and which incorporated an injured players fund, to emerge. As with soccer, for Newcastle, rugby league became, in common with pigeon racing, brass bands, cheap housing, co-operative movements and traditions of

labour militancy and industrial unrest, an expression of cultural links with the North of England. Local factors also shaped the emergence of 'professional' rugby. In Newcastle rugby league was formed in the maelstrom of events surrounding the so-called 1909 Peter Bowling strike on the Hunter River coal fields. Many coal mine owners were evidently connected with rugby union, and this reputedly assisted the cause of rugby league among Novocastrians, such that it was regarded as 'anti-union to even fraternise with the rugby union players'. Newcastle competed successfully in the foundation year of the New South Wales premiership, despite not having a home ground and competing each weekend in Sydney, thus facing an overnight boat trip or 200 mile return rail journey. In 1909 a home and away system was introduced while officials attempted to secure a local ground. The first game of rugby league thus took place in Newcastle on 22 May 1909 on Broadmeadow Showground. A gala occasion against Easts, it featured a strategic double billing — a game of soccer was a warm-up. By 1910 the problem of distance caused Newcastle to withdraw from the Sydney competition and focus on an internal Hunter Valley competition. In 1911 a Northern Branch of the New South Wales Rugby League was established. Local newspaper reports tended to refer to the game as 'Northern Union'. Despite internal ructions which created a breakaway group in 1917 — appropriately enough dubbed the Bolsheviks — the Novocastrians gradually succeeded where the Northerners in England did not. They took King Soccer on — and won.⁴⁷

It was not so much that every acolyte of antipodean rugby league spoke with the broad vowels of a transplanted Yorkshireman or Geordie. Indeed, some like John Fihelly, who played rugby union for Queensland and Australia before converting to the cause of rugby league in Queensland, spoke with an Irish brogue.⁴⁸ Certainly many of Irish-Catholic background played the game because of rugby league's class milieu. Perhaps the crowning moment in establishing rugby league's hegemony over rugby union came in 1926 when Marist Brothers announced their affiliation with the 'people's game'.⁴⁹

Though neither was in any way associated with the establishment of rugby league in England, it seems likely that many followed the trajectory of immigrants like Charles H. Ford and Harry 'Jersey' Flegg. Aged nineteen the former had emigrated to Australia in 1888 from Middlesborough, Yorkshire. In his youth Ford had played soccer. Finding himself in North Sydney in 1891, he played rugby union for the Pirates. When the 'professional' code began, Ford was quickly involved. A tall and burly figure with a bushy mustache, he was North Sydney's representative at the secret 1907 meeting at Victor Trumper's sports store. Employed as a harbour ferry master he became



a pivotal figure within the North Sydney club and the New South Wales Rugby League itself. Ford successfully organised a tour of Maori footballers in 1909. In the same year he became a vice-president of the New South Wales Rugby League and chairman of its management committee, helping to stave off an internal faction fight whose public ramifications threatened to destroy the credibility of the League. In 1911 he was appointed manager of the second Kangaroo touring team, presumably because of his administrative acumen, but perhaps also for his local knowledge of the North. No doubt Ford relished revisiting the places of his youth, but by and large, he was not in the habit of keeping in touch with home. In 1921 his distressed mother travelled from Middlesbrough to Harrogate where the Kangaroo team was staying. She hoped to elicit any news of her son's welfare. The *Yorkshire Evening Standard* reported that Ford was reputedly then a government official, working at a place called 'Cambara' (sic), apparently the future site of the federal capital but which was 'yet to be built'. The colonies, it seemed, were remarkably fragile places.⁵⁰

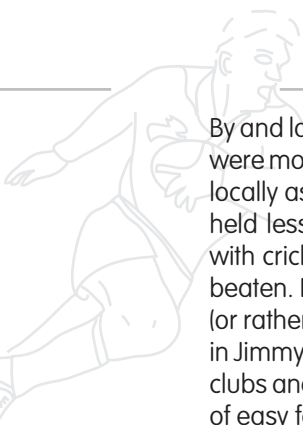
'Jersey' Flegg's experience was comparable. Born in Bradford on 6 April 1878, Flegg emigrated with his family, aged six.⁵¹ One of Easts founding players and activists, indeed the very individual who booked the Paddington Town Hall for the club's foundation meeting, as well as president of the New South Wales Rugby League from 1929-60, Flegg derived his nickname from a chance meeting with the New South Wales governor Lord Jersey as a school boy at Plunkett Street, Woolloomooloo.⁵² Flegg quickly discarded any residual element of deference and eschewed the gruff egalitarianism more commonly associated with Australian social life and rugby league, featuring in a famous exchange later on in life with another English lord. So the story goes W. J. McKell, the former Labor premier, governor-general and patron of the New South Wales Rugby League, once introduced the visiting Lord McDonald to Flegg. Not hearing correctly, Flegg greeted the English visitor, 'G'day Claude'. McKell corrected him: 'No Jerse, it's Lord, not Claude'. Without breaking stride Flegg retorted: 'We don't go with that bull — here. This is Australia.'⁵³

If the migration of individuals like Charles Ford and Harry Flegg perhaps assisted rugby league's ready acceptance in eastern Australia, local variables also influenced outcomes in relation to the parent body of rugby union. In New South Wales, as with northern England, social forces were influential. As the Marxist economic historian George Parsons argues: 'Class consciousness produced rugby league' when 'a conjuncture of historical forces ... reached its critical mass in 1907'.⁵⁴ As a cultural phenomenon rugby league emerged from a period when the working class was recovering from the defeats of the 1890s and reasserting itself

industrially and politically. The debate about professionalism in sport was part of this broader working class challenge, a contribution to the project of civilising capitalism, as was the taking of the parliamentary road in the formation of the ALP. Apart from reflecting assertiveness and legitimate industrial relations concerns, the demand for 'broken time' and injury compensation payments, also expressed the growing self-confidence of the working class movement. This was also manifested in patterns of housing, consumption and general patterns of popular recreation, and given great impetus by the famous 1907 Harvester Judgement by Mr Justice Higgins about the need for a 'living wage'. In short the working people who were part of the football intrigues of 1907-08 were entitled to think that history was on their side.

Elsewhere the circumstances were less propitious for a change in football allegiance. In New Zealand A. H. Baskerville's 'Professionals' met a determined if sometimes inept response from the rugby union hierarchy who nonetheless had already appropriated the mantle of New Zealand nationalism — or more specifically imperial patriotism — for their game.⁵⁵ In Wales rugby union had also become an expression of Welsh nationalism and was seen as 'the national game' while a degree of 'professionalism' was tolerated in order to accommodate working men.⁵⁶ In Scotland, by the time the split between rugby league and rugby union became an issue, soccer was already established as the game of the working class. The middle-class administrators of rugby union were delighted that this was so. In France, rugby league's subordinate status in relation to rugby union was largely conditioned by events from a subsequent period — the Vichy government's war-time collaboration with both the Nazis and the Rugby Union hierarchy — together with a subsequent Cold War campaign which equated rugby league with the menace of international socialism.⁵⁷

As Jacqueline Dwyer's study of the Flanders region in northern France illustrates, ties of blood and commerce could create strong and enduring relationships between region and nation.⁵⁸ Relations between Australia and northern England, too, were mediated by a shared sense of sporting identity with the North, through business interconnections and by the common blood sacrifice that took place at Gallipoli, with proud Northern England regiments like the Lancashire Fusiliers.⁵⁹ Unsurprisingly the relationship was ambiguous. This was no mutual admiration society. The war historian, Dr Bean's dismissal of the fighting abilities of the British 'puny narrow-chested ... slum kids' was emphatic — and he may or may not have been referring to Londoners.⁶⁰ Considering the ferocity of the so-called 'Rorke's Drift' Test in Melbourne played on the eve of the First World War,⁶¹ it was perhaps remarkable that the working classes of both countries were able to fight on the one side.



By and large, however, the connections forged by sport and rugby league were more positive than negative. The northern 'Poms' were usually known locally as the 'Chooms', a parody of the Yorkshire accent, which perhaps held less approbation than the term 'Pom', though there remained, as with cricket, no doubt that the mother country had to be confronted and beaten. Both parties were complicit in sustaining the fiction that Australia (or rather two States) was confronting England (three counties). Following in Jimmy Devereux's footsteps, rugby league and the interaction between clubs and players created de facto citizens of two countries,⁶² and a sense of easy familiarity in eastern Australia with names like Wigan, Castleford and Hull. On the northern peninsula of Sydney one boy from Preston, Yorkshire, Malcolm Reilly, is remembered as fondly as any local, with the possible exception of the Warrington-born Bob ('Bozo') Fulton. When Reilly assumed his coaching duties with the Newcastle Knights he 'thought of how alike Newcastle was to some of the Yorkshire towns I knew, where the closing of mines and factories had snuffed out jobs and hope and changed these places forever'.⁶³ The Knights' 1997 premiership, spear-headed by two sons of a coal miner and strong trade unionist, was a real life version of 'Brassed Off'.

Indeed, perhaps my argument is partly one about responses to accents, a subjective issue but real enough. Commentator Eddie Waring's broad Yorkshire accent is a treasured icon of my sporting youth. Briefly in the late 1960s, because the BBC had television rights to rugby league, British games were sometimes shown on the ABC. Monochrome and granular, my father and I were avid viewers. This coincided with Arthur Beetson's brief stint with Hull Kingston Rovers. Dad and I would repeat Eddie Waring's protracted rendition of big Arthur's surname — Bee-ee-ee-tson — to our hearts' content. In the Australian scheme of things the cultivated Southern English accent may seem like 'putting on the dog', false and pretentious. The Yorkshire accent on the other hand is welcome because it imparts more warmth, frankness and sincerity. Certainly, through police dramas and soaps, Australians are bombarded with Yorkshire accents on their television screens. I am reliably informed, by Tony Collins, that Leeds became the major call centre capital for England in part because polling showed a general trust in the Yorkshire accent, and partly because Yorkshire people are reputedly famous for their frugality and financial 'commonsense'.

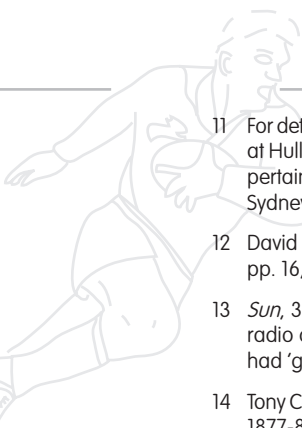
Listening to Dave Russel speak at rugby league's centenary conference at the University of Huddersfield in 1995, it seemed that there was something very familiar about the attributes of the 'typical' Yorkshireman. Among other things this person was evidently 'blunt-brusque', 'sport-loving', 'egalitarian/meritocratic/useful', 'hard-working', 'independent', 'phlegmatic' and

'a "race apart"/separate/distinctive'.⁶⁴ Comparisons with Russel Ward's mythic Australian character, invoked in his landmark book *The Australian Legend*, came quickly to mind. The 'Yorkshire Legend' shared many attributes with Professor Ward's bush democrats, anti-authoritarian, independent, hospitable, stoic and sardonic.⁶⁵

Over the years Ward's generalisations have been subject to vigorous reinterpretation, but if it is indeed true that Australians are 'knockers' of eminent people, 'unless, as in the case of ... sporting heroes, they are distinguished by physical prowess',⁶⁶ rugby league must surely have been an important conduit. Adrian McGregor is right when he refers to an 'intangible bond' created by the 'international brotherhood of rugby league'.⁶⁷ Rooted in a shared sense of historical memory and common values, remote from the rarefied circles of the London elite, in the final resort a shared allegiance to rugby league reflected the commonalities and the rich historical associations between the working-class cultures of Northern England and eastern Australia.

Endnotes

- 1 *Australian*, 8 Sept. 1999.
- 2 Nicholas Fishwick, *English Football and Society 1910-1950*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989, pp. xi-xii.
- 3 Jeff Hill and Jack Williams, 'Introduction', Jeff Hill and Jack Williams, eds, *Sport and Identity in Northern England*, Keele University Press, Keele, 1996, p. 6.
- 4 *London Calling: The Independent London Broncos Fanzine*, 32, Mar. 1999, p. 9.
- 5 See, for instance, Michael Roe, *Australia, Britain and Migration 1915-1940*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1995.
- 6 Tony Collins, *Rugby's Great Split: Class, Culture and the Origins of Rugby League Football*, Frank Cass, London, 1998.
- 7 On the day this lecture was delivered — 29 September 1999 — the president and board of the North Sydney Rugby League Football resigned and announced that the club had been placed in voluntary receivership. With \$4m owed to creditors the terms of a merger with Manly — to create a new entity styled the Northern Eagles — were not favourable.
- 8 See Andrew Moore, *The Mighty Bears! A Social History of North Sydney Rugby League*, Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 1996, pp. 25-6; unless acknowledged separately references to Devereux are drawn from this source.
- 9 Dave Hadfield, *Playing Away: Australians in British Rugby League*, Kingswood Press, London, 1992, p. 6.
- 10 Ian Clayton, Ian Daley and Robert Gate, eds, *When Push Comes to Shove*, vol. 2, Yorkshire Art Circus, Castleford, 1995, p. 59.

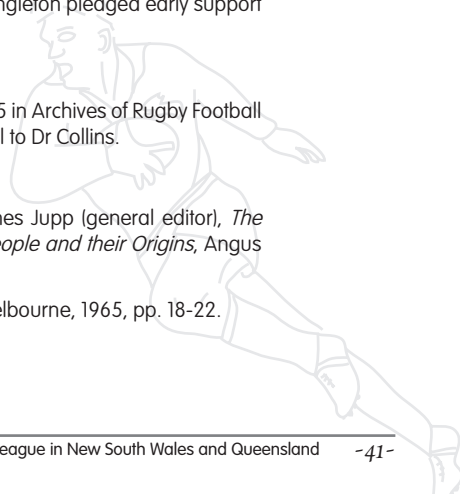


- 11 For details of Jim Devereux's marriage to Daisy Elizabeth Heath, daughter of George Heath at Hull I am grateful to George Franki, who uncovered this and other family information pertaining to Devereux in the Baptismal Register of St Mary's Church, Ridge Street, North Sydney.
- 12 David Bowman, *Harold Bowman On Tour Down Under*, Hutton Press, Beverley, 1992, pp. 16,19.
- 13 *Sun*, 30 Oct. 1941 suggests that Devereux 'died in England about four years ago'. In a radio address in May 1936 Jack McGrath, Norths president, suggested that Devereux had 'gone west' (*Rugby League News*, 9 May 1936).
- 14 Tony Collins 'Noa Mutton, Noa Laaking': The Origins of Payment for Play in Rugby Football, 1877-86', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, vol. 12, no. 1, Apr. 1995, pp. 33-50; Tony Collins, 'Myth and Reality in the 1895 Rugby Split', *The Sports Historian*, no. 16, May 1996, pp. 33-41.
- 15 See Andrew Moore. 'Constructing Myths and Legends: the Early Years of Rugby League in New South Wales', paper presented to annual conference, Royal Australian Historical Society, Sydney, 8 Oct. 1994 and De Montfort University, Leicester UK, 5 Nov. 1994.
- 16 Compare *Daily Telegraph*, 100 Years of Rugby League, Pt 6, Aug. 1999. For this reference I am grateful to Mr John Moore.
- 17 Ian Heads *True Blue: The Story of the NSW Rugby League*, Ironbark Press, Sydney, 1992, pp. 33-77.

Kilnsey Crag, North Yorkshire



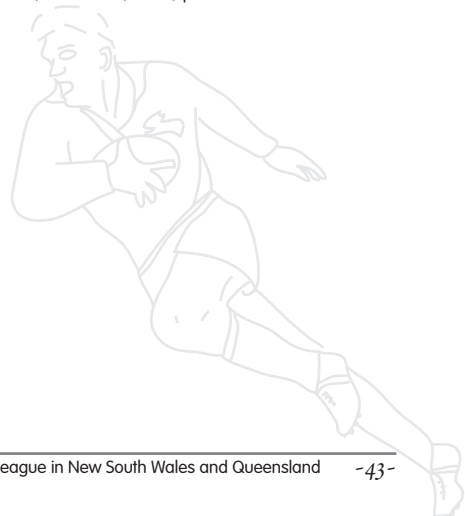
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- 23 Herbert M. Moran, *Viewless Winds: Being the Recollections and Digressions of an Australian Surgeon*, Peter Davis, London, 1939, pp. 36-7.
- 24 Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p. 217.
- 25 Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p. 224.
- 26 See, for instance, Ken Buckley and Ted Wheelwright, *No Paradise for Workers: Capitalism and the Common People in Australia 1788-1914*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988, Chs 11-13.
- 27 Moore, 'Opera of the Proletariat'.
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- 29 Further research of the *Sydney Sportsman* and *Bathurst Post* in 1907 fails to shed any further light on Bathurst's early embrace of rugby league. Haynes, *From All Blacks to All Golds*, p. 76, suggests that the towns of Morpeth and Singleton pledged early support for rugby league.
- 30 Collins, *Rugby's Great Split*, p. 221.
- 31 Minutes of Council of Rugby Football League, 10 Oct. 1945 in Archives of Rugby Football League, Leeds. For facilitating access I am again grateful to Dr Collins.
- 32 *Yorkshire Post*, 8 Oct. 1908.
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- 43 A valuable account of working-class militancy in Newcastle at the turn of the century is Tony Laffan, *The Freethinker's Paradise: Newcastle's Secular Hall of Science*, Toiler Editions, Singleton, 1998.
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- 45 Nancy Cushing, 'Coalopolis to Steel City: Perceptions of Newcastle 1797-1859', *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 57, May 1998, pp. 63-4.
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- 52 *True Blue*. Heads reports that schoolmates of the 'carrotty-haired' Flegg coined the name when they observed Lord Jersey's red hair and red beard at a city welcome to the new governor. The name stuck to Flegg for the rest of his life.

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- 54 Parsons, 'Capitalism, Class and Community', p. 9.
- 55 Geoffrey T. Vincent and Toby Harfield, 'Repression and Reform: Responses within New Zealand Rugby to the Arrival of the 'Northern Game', 1907-8, *New Zealand Journal of History*, 1997.
- 56 Roy Andrews, 'Sport and the Masculine Hegemony of the Modern Nation: Welsh Rugby, Culture and Society, 1890-1914' in Nauright and Chandler, eds, *Making Men*, pp. 53, 58.
- 57 Roy Masters, 'As Verbal Battle among Codes Continues, Don't Forget the War', *SMH*, 26 Aug. 1999 citing thesis of Robert Fassollette, *The War Between the Two Rugbys during the War Years*. See also Phil Dine, 'Money, Identity and Conflict: Rugby League in France', *The Sports Historian*, no. 16, May 1996, pp. 99-116.
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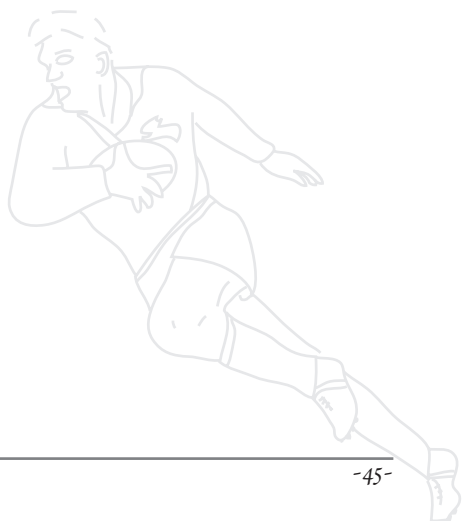


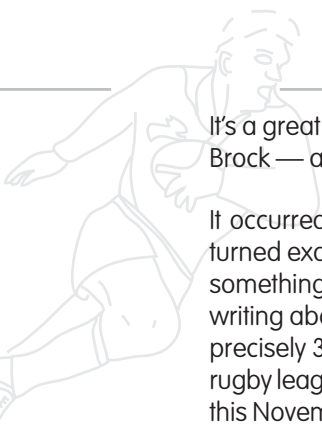


Gang-Gangs at One O'Clock ...
and Other Flights of Fancy:
A Personal Journey Through Rugby League

30 November 2000, UNSW

Ian Heads OAM





It's a great pleasure and an honour to be here tonight in the name of Tom Brock — a man I so much respected and admired.

It occurred to me as I sat down to prepare my talk that the wheel had turned exactly 360 degrees when it came to the question of my career — something I lurched into 35 years or so ago — a career observing and writing about the game of rugby league ... and some other sports. It was precisely 30 years ago in fact that I made my first overseas trip to cover a rugby league tournament for the *Daily & Sunday Telegraphs*. And as it was this November 2000, that too was for a World Cup in England — though it was a small and select and genuine rugby league 'world' back then — of Australia, Britain, France and New Zealand — and a Cup fiercely contested at a high level and ending in the infamous Battle of Leeds final in which Australia somehow pinched it away from the 'Brits' amidst the mayhem and fury of a late-autumn afternoon at Headingley. It was one of the two most brutal games I ever covered as a journalist — the 1973 grand final, Cronulla versus Manly, being the other.

After that game in 1970 there were no trumped-up calls that this team or that was the greatest-ever — just delight at a victory unexpectedly won and head-banging frustration for a British team who had already proved themselves superior to us that year — but who had let it slip on the day.

My suspicion is that the 'best ever' tag loosely cast in the direction of this current (2000) side is no more or less than something contrived by today's spin doctors to create an 'image' in a sadly devalued game so desperately searching for positives on which to build a reasonable future — although Fittler's men no doubt rank as a very talented and professional football team ... as they rightly should be as full-time, highly-paid athletes and the best in their business. I remember one of the National Rugby League (NRL) publicity people telling me not long ago that his job in the game was 'to create heroes'. 'Create' seemed to me very much the operative word of that message — i.e., if the 'heroes' don't genuinely exist ... well, let's pump it up and contrive it anyway ... not such a difficult task when half the game or more is owned by a media giant, and ALL the strings are pulled by that same company. So it is, I suspect with the Australian team of 2000, and the rating so casually afforded them. It is also in line with the NRL's approach to releasing crowd figures for season 2000 — to trumpet 'record' average crowds while neglecting to mention in any way that aggregate crowds were substantially down on the previous year's figures.

On reflection, my talk tonight is something akin to an early Steve Mortimer performance: a bit skittish and all over the place. It comprises in its wider overview things I have learned, been told, understood and observed in that period from 1970 to now — and in reality from a little earlier too, it being as far back as 1963 that the sporting editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, Gerry Pynt, a small, serious man who conducted his affairs with an ear glued to the race-calls on his mantle radio, first threw me the ball to cover rugby league matches at weekends and before long the task too of keeping up with the machinations of the game itself during the week as support to chief league writer George Crawford — a rather strange and testy character, but a man with a monumental love for the game and an equivalent knowledge of it. After seven or eight beers at the King's Head at tea time, George's voice would thunder across the small sports room as he rang Frank Facer and Acker Forbes and Bill Beaver and the other club secretaries of the time, chasing tomorrow's news.

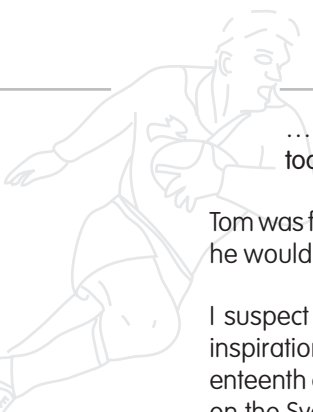
'That you Spag?' was a particularly familiar cry — 'Spag' being Spencer O'Neill, secretary of Parramatta and a drinking mate of George's — and old George being something of a Parramatta fan.

My guiding lights for tonight's exercise are two in number — with the admirable Tom Brock, whose name adorns this evening, the first of them. In the course of the search-and-gather process which made him a genuinely great historian of the game — Tom loved the 'bits' of rugby league ... the quieter by-ways and alleys, the tiny details that often told so much about an individual or a moment. For example we had a shared interest in an eccentric character of the game's early years, Ernest Edmund 'Bustler' Quinsey. Among other things 'Bustler' was a winger, a bookie's runner and a wharfie. He was also a rabbitoh who would walk the street with a brace or two of rabbits slung over his shoulder. He pretty much pre-dated Souths, being a rugby union player from earlier days — but grew to love the Rabbitohs anyway and was with them through the 1920s. Digging deep, Tom uncovered many intriguing snippets about Buster:

The wonderful story of him tricking the university (rugby union) defence one day by passing the old brown hat he wore in matches, instead of the ball — before racing on to score a try.

The likelihood that he most often played in bare feet.

The colourful story of Quinsey being tripped by a spectator wielding an iron bar as he made a sideline dash one day



... this not being regarded as a major hazard in football today.

Tom was fascinated by Bustler and now and then my phone would ring and he would excitedly relate some small further tidbit he had uncovered.

I suspect Tom Brock would have much liked John Aubrey — the other inspiration for the theme of my talk. I was awakened to Aubrey, the seventeenth century London diarist, by Roy Dotrice's wonderful portrait of him on the Sydney stage (in 'Brief Lives') fifteen or so years ago. John Aubrey was probably English literature's greatest collector of gossip, anecdotes and personal trivia.



Harry Wells, an admirer of Gang-Gang Cockatoos

He was the pre-eminent compiler of the doings and sayings of the major and minor figures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and a significant tittle tat. He lived through difficult times — including the English Civil War, featuring the downfall and execution of Charles I. Having witnessed the downfall and virtual execution of the game of rugby league in the years 1995–2000 I feel comfortable enough about evoking his style tonight. Aubrey wrote 420 of his 'Lives' — and described them as 'like fragments of a shipwreck'. Again the parallel with rugby league is unavoidable. So, if what

follows now is somewhat jagged and jumpy in style and content, please blame Tom Brock ... and John Aubrey.

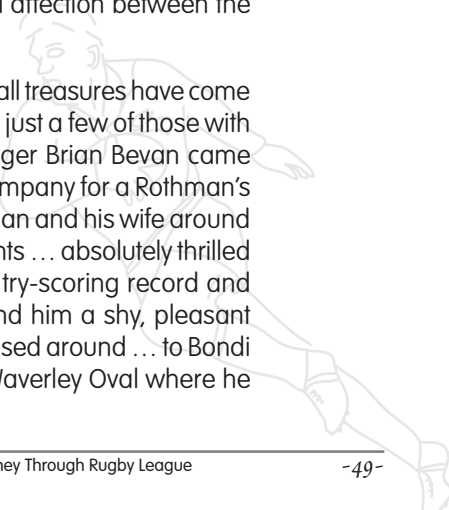
Sometimes the very tiniest of insights can provide a jolt of illumination. An example: I remember one infinitesimal corner of a conversation I had with the legendary five eighth Vic Hey many years ago. A pal in London, Harvey Davis, who saw almost every game of Hey's English career, continues to

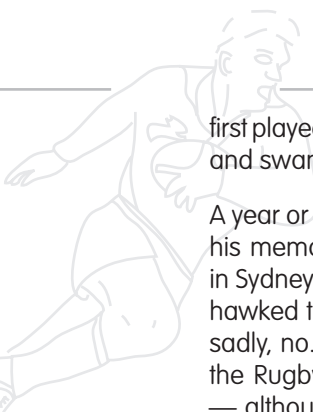
assure me beyond question that he was the greatest five eighth of them all. In conversation in Sydney one day, Hey talked about getting ready for football. He said this: 'The one thing I never do before a match is cut my fingernails. I believe the slight change in the "feel" of your hands when you cut your nails can affect handling.' I must admit, it was something that had never crossed my mind.

At my home in Sydney, another one of the greatest of players — maybe the GREATEST of them all — Clive Churchill, is remembered unusually. At the time when my twin children were tiny, Clive had the bottle shop at Frenchman's Road, Randwick, and I would occasionally visit him there for a yarn or for some supplies ... for medicinal purposes only, of course. There, Clive would entertain my kids with a brilliant Donald Duck impersonation. Sadly that same bottle shop which was his working life for a while contributed to Clive's early demise; he never seemed the same man after the brutal pistol-whipping he took from some villains there one night. But at my place he is remembered affectionately ... as a funny little bloke in a grog shop who could impersonate Donald Duck to a tee. More senior members of the gathering tonight, which includes an old Churchill school pal Alan Clarkson and a journo who toured England and France with him in 1948, Phil Tresidder, undoubtedly remember him for very different reasons.

Churchill's old sparring partner from 1951 Puig-Aubert of Carcassonne, remembered Clive with something approaching love, I suspect. I recall a highly enjoyable afternoon at Lang Park years ago when over several games of pool and several glasses of port, Puig-Aubert talked of his battles with Churchill and of the 1951 side — smoke issuing from the ever-present Gitane, arms and cue waving to illustrate. 'Ahhh Churcheel ... he would be here and I would kick THERE ... and he would be there ... and I would kick HERE. Churcheel ... he is my friend.' Although slightly more gruffly, Clive saw it that way too. The mutual respect and affection between the two of them was very real.

In the course of my working life in league, many small treasures have come my way, sometimes unexpectedly, and I will share just a few of those with you this evening. Some years ago, the great winger Brian Bevan came home quietly to Sydney, guest of the Rothman's company for a Rothman's Medal. On a beautiful Sydney day I chauffeured Brian and his wife around the eastern suburbs — taking him back to old haunts ... absolutely thrilled to meet this rather strange, remote figure with a try-scoring record and a career almost too remarkable to believe. I found him a shy, pleasant man — and there was much enjoyment as we cruised around ... to Bondi Beach Public where he went to school ... up to Waverley Oval where he





first played rugby league ... on and down to Neilsen Park where he played and swam as a kid.

A year or so later, a package arrived in the mail. Brian Bevan had written his memoirs and wondered in his modest way whether any publisher in Sydney might be vaguely interested in producing them in book form. I hawked the manuscript around the city — and the answer to that was, sadly, no. 'Wouldn't sell a copy' one publisher told me brusquely. I tried the Rugby League itself. No, they were not in the publishing business — although sympathetic and interested in the fact that the manuscript existed. Eventually, reluctantly, I packaged the couple of hundred pages up and sent them back to Brian in England where, no doubt, they rest to this day with his widow. Encouraged by Brian Bevan's quiet encouragement to 'take anything I wished' from the pages, I copied some of it and will share here with you a brief excerpt or two, unpublished insights into an extraordinary footballer:

Firstly, on the famous sidestep which swept him to so many tries:

Bevan: The long hours spent perfecting my sidestep in Australia stood me in good stead. It's one of the greatest attributes a player can possess, yet I rarely see it used today ... in general players tend to begrudge the time necessary to master it. For my part it was a schoolboy phobia for racing the crowds out of the Sydney Cricket Ground; it all began with my desire to get home early after big games. The way out of the ground was down a long pathway with concrete posts set along each side of it. Awkwardly at first, I would try to weave my way between spectators and posts in a bid to get to the front. It became a habit, and with growing exuberance and proficiency I developed the knack of dodging all obstacles. My father helped me perfect the sidestep even further by taking me to the local park and encouraging me to run at top speed at posts placed five or six yards apart.

On how he managed to last so long in the game, and to score so many tries:

Bevan: I was often asked these questions. My answer always was that I loved the game. Fitness was my first priority, followed by a perseverance in speed and sprint training, a routine I adhered to doggedly through my career. I also had a kind of mania for running spikes — and the use of these in sprint training helped me retain my speed season after season.

Stamina training and plenty of physical exercises played a major part too. I found that shadow boxing was second to none when it came to stamina building. I also developed some kind of ‘killer instinct’ on the field — in plainer terms an attitude of almost hating the opposition, so much so I completely shut myself off from a lot of things.

On being strapped up like an Egyptian mummy for matches:

Bevan: It was a precaution that I made a ritual of and one which kept me free of any serious injuries during my playing days. I always made sure of both knees being padded as this part of the body is most vulnerable of all to injuries. The only bad knocks I sustained during my whole career were a knee ligament injury (absent for six weeks) and a broken jaw (off for two months).

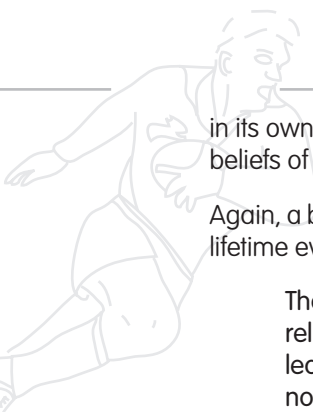
It is worth noting here that Bevan played 783 games of football in sixteen seasons in England, and scored 824 tries. The mind tends to boggle.

In Sydney a couple of years ago Vince Karalius told me a story which I’m sure got close to a Bevan secret — his tremendous competitiveness. Karalius recalled playing in a charity game with Bevan — when the old wingman was 50 years of age. Whippet-thin and still fast, Bevan had run in four tries in a match featuring the best players in the land. Karalius told the story this way: ‘I was sat in the bath with Bev after the game and I patted him on the back and said “you’ve not lost your touch old pal”. He didn’t smile. He just looked at me and said: “I should have had six”’.

On another day a few years after the Bevan visit, I received another bulky package from an old pal in the game, Peter Corcoran. It seemed that years before, probably around 1975, one of the game’s most influential and interesting figures — the half back wizard of early days Duncan Thompson, known as the ‘Downs Fox’ had penned an autobiography. It had been sent around the traps, failed to find a publisher — and the one surviving copy had finished up forgotten in a dusty cupboard, with some other league papers. Peter had rescued it, and passed it on. Like the Bevan story, it is



Duncan Thompson



in its own way a mini-masterpiece — throwing fresh light on the life and beliefs of a famous, forgotten league man.

Again, a brief extract or two. On 'contract' football which was Thompson's lifetime evangelical mission:

Thompson: Contract football is flowing football. It has no relation to the present bash and barge stuff. It is what rugby league is all about — or is supposed to be. The player does not die with the ball. It moves on and on. Ideally no ball carrier is so smothered that he must play the ball.

In preaching the case for intelligence in football Thompson tells the story of a day in which a New Zealand centre named Iffersen gave Australian ace Les Cubitt what he described as 'a hell of a day'. He wrote:



Les Cubitt, in his early days and in 1922

So severe was Iffersen's tackling that Cubitt finally lost his head. He tucked the ball under his arm and tried to barge through the Kiwi. Of course he came to grief. In the end Iffersen played all over him. But I have always admired Les for what he said to me after that match: 'Never sacrifice science son'.

On the 'social' side of the 1921-22 Kangaroo tour:

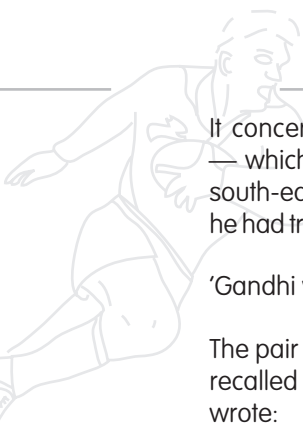
Thompson: Of the 26 players, thirteen were drinkers and thirteen were non-drinkers. There was no animosity between the two groups; we were, by and large, a very happy team. But we were clearly two factions. Traveling by train in England, each group would sit in different compartments. In the dining room on the ship that took us to England, we sat at different tables. Nothing was thought of it.

On the theory that tour misbehaviour is a new phenomenon:

Thompson: The first tour crisis (of the 1921-22 campaign) occurred the night before we decked in San Francisco. The thirteen drinkers had a binge — a pretty riotous one from all accounts in which a lot of glasses were broken. The one blamed for most of the damage was young George Carstairs, a teenager on his first tour. The captain of the ship was understandably furious and read the riot act to the tour managers. It was decided that Carstairs would be sent home. I promptly called a meeting of the non-drinkers and we agreed that if Carstairs went home, we went home with him. We told skipper Cubitt of this and the management had no option but to let Carstairs continue the tour.

A third treasured document I hold exists in the form of crumpled single-sheet copy paper from 50 years ago, pinned with a rusty clip — a story written by the distinguished recorder of both league and cricket's cavalcade, Thomas Lyall Goodman — Tom Goodman — who was pretty much my mentor in journalism and in sportswriting — even though he worked for the *Herald* and I worked for the *Telegraph*. Tom was a graceful, charming, gentle man. If he ever criticised in print — and he did, sparingly — well, you knew for sure the criticism was warranted. But in a career in which he covered the life and times of Bradman in its entirety and rugby league tests and premiership deciders beyond counting ... his favourite memory had nothing to do with sport.





It concerned instead, a brief meeting he had with Mahatma Gandhi — which came during Tom’s two-year stint as a war correspondent in south-east Asia for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In the story Tom told how he had tried for days to gain an audience with Gandhi. Finally, a note came:

‘Gandhi will see you on Sunday for two minutes. But no politics.’

The pair met in a large house of a wealthy Indian industrialist. Goodman recalled how Gandhi emerged in characteristic shining white garb. He wrote:

A few cautious questions, and then I enquired of Gandhi’s health. He responded. ‘It is not very bad. I want to keep well — I want to achieve our great objective.’

Was it a trap, Goodman, mused. I’ll never know. But when I asked what that objective was — the little man shook a bony finger in my face and snapped: ‘Ah! Two minutes and no politics! And now you must go!’ I murmured an apology, and stood there embarrassed.

Gandhi closed the door behind him. The Hindu leaders had been listening through the half-open door. As Mahatma closed it behind him there came a gale of laughter. Above all I could hear (and still do) the ‘Tee-hee-hee’ — the high cackle of Mr. Gandhi. The Mahatma, it seemed, had had his little joke.

A fourth, brief correspondence, arriving unexpectedly, and written almost 60 years after the event, provides an intriguing last view on one of league’s great ‘mysteries’ — did Joe Chimpy Busch score a fair try against Great Britain in the deciding Test match of the 1929-30 series? The letter arrived not long after Chimpy’s death in mid 1999 — from William A. Anderson of Parbold, Lancashire whose grandmother Elizabeth Webster was the brother of Albert Webster the touch judge who infamously disallowed the Busch try in the Test at Swinton. Sending his condolences to the Busch family, Mr Anderson noted the following:

Joe Busch is almost part of our family history — and his name is well respected here. We never knew Albert Webster, and therefore could never question him on the ‘try’. But I have thoroughly researched the newspapers of the time and the

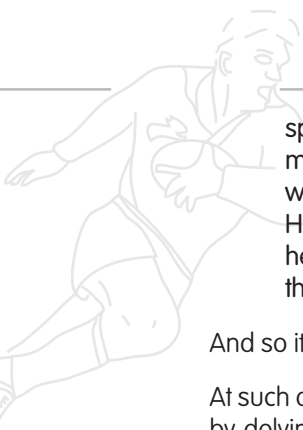
view seems to be that it was a fair try. So there it is — an admission from a family at the heart of it that Joe almost certainly scored after all. The man himself incidentally, never had ANY doubt.

I no longer consider myself a rugby league writer. An occasional observer, perhaps these days. It is a fair while now since I have gone into a press box — and media mates tell me they're often better left well alone anyway — with the talk within, I'm told, too often being of a mocking and cynical nature, a lingering residue very likely of the unpleasant edge that the Super League war brought into the game. Within the media there developed fierce, deep rivalries — hatred even ... the Super League division the catalyst for that, carving deep scars that will perhaps never heal. I MUCH prefer to remember the great camaraderie of my own, admittedly imperfect, years within the game, when blokes like E.E. 'Ernie' Christensen, Bill Mordey, big Jim Connolly, Alan Clarkson and I competed vigorously for stories — but so thoroughly enjoyed being in each other's company and enjoyed the shared experience of the Kangaroo and World Cup tours ... and never hesitated to help each other out if we could.

And I remember the league gentlemen like the *Sun's* W.F. 'Bill' Corbett and the *Herald's* Tom Goodman who were so good and generous to young reporters — and such shrewd, wise observers of the games they covered. In gathering some material for tonight I stumbled across Kenneth Slessor's assessment of perhaps the greatest of all league writers Claude Corbett, Bill's brother. On Corbett's death, Slessor wrote: 'Throughout his career as a critic and recorder of sport, his one principle was to encourage ... not to knock. He tried to make his commentary constructive and suggestive, and especially to give the obscure struggler a chance.'

Oh, for some more of that today. Instead, among some of the shrillest and most influential media voices in today's game there is a quality of pumped-up self-importance, an unpleasantness, a derisory rebuttal of anyone who dares to disagree. I suspect some of them could do with a regular dose of the cutting words of Emmy Cosell, widow of the late, loud US sportscaster Howard Cosell. Journalist William Nack tells the story of Cosell at a party 'fondling his ninth vodka martini'. He wrote:

And suddenly there he was across the room, hovering over one table, scolding and sarcastic, loud and bombastic — the familiar cigar jabbing the air, the voice growing louder as the Havana grew shorter. Howard was Coselling again,



speaking of sports, of broadcasting, of anything that came to mind. Finally the rest of the room fell silent, and all to be heard was the voice of Howard, America's voice. During the lull, Howard's wife, Emmy, sitting across the room, summoned her husband back to earth with a voice that went boom in the night. 'Howard, shut up! Nobody cares.'

And so it is, I suspect with some of today's commentators.

At such a positive gathering as tonight's I have no wish to depress you all by delving too far into what rugby league has become today. Suffice to say that while accepting the reality that things change in life, and must, I deplore much of what has happened to the game, deplore the way it has been done — deplore the fact of the game's denial of its history and tradition in the name of such things as 'unanswerable economic logic' and 'moving forward' ... that numbingly over-worked phrase. Rugby league's story in the years 1995-2000 is surely the ugliest and dumbest — with equal emphasis on both words — in all Australian sport's 200 years.

The central theme of Simon Kelner's book *To Jerusalem and Back* nails the \$64 question: 'is the globalisation of the sport worth the price that has to be paid if that price is the death of clubs with years of history, tradition and cultural involvement in their communities?' When a fundamental part of our heritage is at stake — as is the way with South Sydney — the answer, of course, is no. It's a matter of great and deep personal regret too that a tough, essentially honest (although flawed) game could have been so deeply infected in recent times by, shallow, self-serving, disloyal, largely-untalented men, reeking of hubris and peddling phony visions ... so infected by them in fact ... that its very future must be considered in some doubt, notwithstanding the fact that rugby league long ago proved itself a tough and resilient critter ... and notwithstanding those good men who have thankfully hung on. Of too many of the others ... and I'm sure you can recite the litany of names ... I am inevitably reminded of Steve Edge's immortal words at a luncheon a couple of years ago: 'You don't have to have a long neck to be a goose!'

One noticeable tactic along the way of these recent seasons — pushed along by those who chose as their career path to be purveyors of News Limited dogma (or dollars) or adherents to some expedient, fingers-crossed belief — which has little to do with reality — in a football 'New Age' — is a betrayal and denial of history. All of us here, I'm sure grew up on the stories of Australia's sporting past — linking the famous people and matches of earlier days seamlessly with the present. Cricket has always done it so well — for example, the current focus on the Australia-West

Indies tied Test. But adopting the philosophy of a corporate hard man such as Al 'Chainsaw' Dunlap — rugby league's new leaders in the midst of all the grubbiness that took place in those early years of the 'war', obviously decided it for the best to largely 'cut clean' — to turn their backs on the stories, the lessons and the heroes of the past, and especially — and worst and most shameful of all — to adopt a tactic of completely ignoring the deep concerns that some of the most respected of its men have so often voiced about the game and its directions. As I have found out, to quote a Frank Hyde or an Ian Walsh or a Noel Kelly ... or a Wally O'Connell ... or plenty of others ... is to risk setting them up ... and having them knocked down publicly and derided as 'the usual dinosaurs being trotted out'. It is disgusting and disrespectful — and a tragic portrayal of what rugby league has allowed itself to become.

In Neville Cardus's book *Second Innings*, Cardus quotes Desmond MacCarthy's essay on Henry James in which MacCarthy describes a passage written by James as 'the most pathetically beautiful tribute in an age of lost elegancies, subtleties and courteous ironic attitudes'. He writes how James was 'horrified by the brutality and rushing confusion of the world, where the dead are forgotten, old ties cynically snapped, and old associations disregarded ... and where one generation tramples on the other'. To its eternal discredit ... so it has been with rugby league, a game brutally divided in early 1995 and in no way re-joined just yet if I read the signs right.

The method of the game's downfall in those early years of the war was, incidentally positively biblical in foundation:

Every Kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand. (Matthew 12:25).

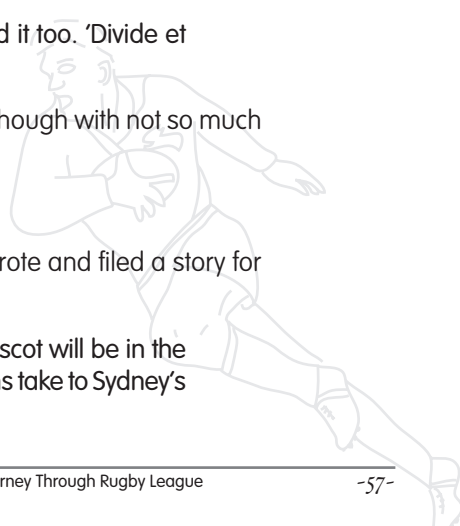
The Romans had a maxim which covered it too. 'Divide et impera'. Divide and rule.

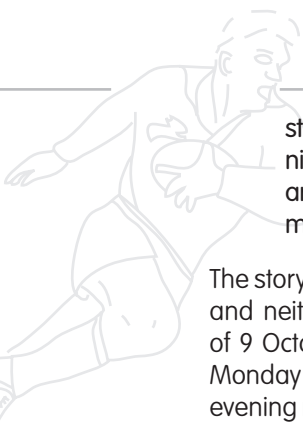
The outcome has been division ... for sure ... although with not so much left to rule.

But enough of that, I reckon ...

On the morning of Friday 8 October last year I wrote and filed a story for the *Sunday Telegraph* which began this way:

Older than the club itself, Albert Cliff of Mascot will be in the vanguard when the South Sydney Rabbitohs take to Sydney's





streets today to begin their fight for life. The rally-march beginning at Souths Leagues Club at 11 am and culminating in and around the Town Hall looms as potentially the largest and most emotional protest event in the history of Australian sport.

The story that followed was spiked. It did not run in the *Sunday Telegraph*, and neither did anything else about the rally. The *Saturday Telegraph* of 9 October also chose to ignore totally the upcoming protest. On the Monday morning, after an evening on which TV channels had led their evening news bulletins on the rally and the vast crowd that had turned up, the *Telegraph* buried the coverage way back in the paper. The next day I resigned from the *Sunday Telegraph* and News Limited in response to what I could only judge as the seriously slanted approach that had been taken to a significant news story — and also at the disrespect shown to a club like Souths, whose story had filled the sports pages of newspapers for 90 years, and which no doubt had sold countless millions of newspapers through the telling of the club's brilliant deeds. Obviously, there was an in-house agenda involved ... not to publicise Souths, and their fight. Right there in flashing red lights, I suggest, was the danger of a media organisation 'owning' a sport. That was pretty much the end for me as a 'hands on' rugby league journalist — although I battled on in 2000, fulfilling contracted obligations in a minor role with *Rugby League Week*.

The truth of it is that the rugby league world has changed forever. I see no point wallowing in nostalgia — although recalling great sport and any deep, happy memory remains a significant pleasure for us all, I'm sure. As Henry Miller once observed — the purpose of life is to remember ... and I must say that my earliest rugby league days spent on the Sydney Sports Ground Hill watching blokes like Terry Fearnley and Jack Gibson run around in the red, white and blue provide especially enduring memories for me to this day.

A reading of Francis Thompson's wonderful old cricket poem — 'At Lord's' — can always evoke that feeling, with Thompson reaching back poignantly to recall the two mighty Lancashire opening batsmen from the last century, A. N. 'Monkey' Hornby and R. G. Barlow who he had watched so many times in his youth. The last verse is this:

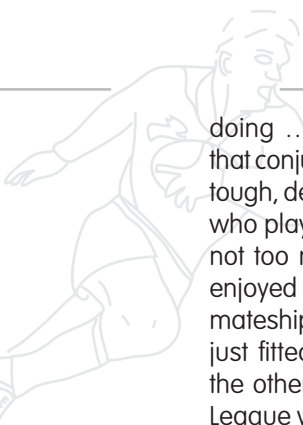
For the field is full of shades as I near the shadowy coast,
And a ghostly batsman plays to the bowling of a ghost,
And I look through my tears at a soundless-clapping host
As the run-stealers flicker to and fro,
To and fro:
Oh my Hornby and my Barlow long ago!

I suppose if there is any message from the bob and weave of my talk tonight it is the happy one that rugby league over the seasons has endlessly constructed a tradition of great characters and notable stories — large and small — a body of colourful deeds, tales of courage and famous contests so deserving of respect to be strong enough to underpin any sport, carry it safely through any tidal wave, you would imagine. I'm not so sure of that anymore though — so profound and shocking has the assault been on what the game was. Only two things now will get it through — the fact that at its best it's a terrific game ... and the further truth that the people of New South Wales and Queensland, at least, showed over 90 years that they loved it better than anything else sporting winters could throw at them. I do not hold my breath for officialdom to weave any magic. I suggest the best they can do is not interfere too much — just present it the way the game has been and is ... hard and plain.

League's passing parade of the last five years, grabbing the headlines, has been of the likes of John Ribot, Porky Morgan, Maurice Lindsay, Graham Carden, Ian Frykberg, Neil Whittaker ... of suited and faceless News Limited numbers men coming and going, of player-managers springing up like mushrooms after rain, of journalists choosing to skirt the code of ethics that guides their profession, of battalions of legal types sweeping into yet another court to fight yet another case. Between them all they managed to create a brand new word that became the mantra for rugby league: 'Badwill'. Because that's exactly what the legacy of it all is to the people who once so faithfully followed the game ...

But these will not be MY images of the game ... I much prefer to bring to mind in conclusion tonight something like the simple scene that provided the title for tonight's talk. It's grand final day on a bush field, years ago and the big bloke in the centres makes a break near halfway, creating an overlap — and sends his winger into clear ground. As he does, he hears a noise overhead. He stops and gazes up — to the sight of a flock of pink and grey gang-gang cockatoos crossing directly overhead, the air punctuated by their squeaky-door calls. He stands transfixed as the play sweeps down the right touch line, and the winger scores in the corner.

Amid the celebrating and the congratulating, teammates look back upfield — to their captain-coach — the great, now ageing Harry Wells, centre partner to Gasnier. Harry is still on the halfway line, head turned skywards, the fact being that although he liked football ... he liked birds even more ... and especially parrots ... and for god's sake there were gang-gangs passing and that was reason enough to stop whatever it was you were



doing ... What an image that conjures up — of a big, tough, decent honest bloke who played his football for not too much money and enjoyed it greatly and the mateship too — and who just fitted it unfussed into the other things in his life. League was like that once.

Many years ago at the funeral of a pal — I think it was Ring Lardner — the peerless American sportswriter Red Smith delivered brief, unforgettable words to begin his eulogy.

‘Dying is no big deal’, he began. ‘The least of us can manage that. Living is the trick.’

I would suggest tonight that rugby league in its decline since 1995 has gone a pretty fair way towards supporting the truth of the first part of the equation. Whether at the turn of the millennium, the game can somehow muster the will, the commonsense and the quality of leadership required to fulfill Red Smith’s second, positive sentiment ... ‘well, the jury remains well and truly out on that’.



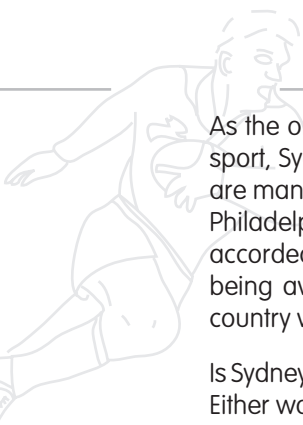
Harry Wells, the Birdman, in full flight against the old enemy, Britain. Wells played Seven Tests against the British and 21 in all, and featured in Three World Cups, 1954, 1957 and 1960.

Sydney: Heart of Rugby League

20 September 2001, UNSW

Alex Buzo





As the only major city in the world where rugby league is the dominant sport, Sydney can claim to be unique. Rome is a soccer city, but then so are many others. New York is a baseball city, but then so are Boston and Philadelphia. Rugby league is played in Leeds and Auckland, but is not accorded the religious status given to other codes. In Melbourne, despite being awarded a premiership in 1999, the game is still called ‘cross-country wrestling’.

Is Sydney the heart of rugby league or is rugby league the heart of Sydney? Either way or neither way, there is a relationship between the game and the city, a history and folklore, that has nourished, inspired and entertained many generations. As a writer, I have always seen it as part of my job to record — with a modest degree of interpretation — the landscape and idiom of the immediate environment. Having been born about a kilometre from North Sydney Oval, I have inevitably taken an interest in what they still call ‘the greatest game of all’, and would like to express gratitude that the Tom Brock Bequest aims at preserving this part of the social history of the oldest city in Australasia.

According to Melbourne historian Robert Pascoe, rugby took hold in Sydney because it is linked to eighteenth century notions about the defence of property. Perhaps in this case ‘an appropriation of property’ should be added, not in reference to the city’s convict origins especially, but because nothing plagues the modern game more than the ball-stripping rule. The relationship between the north of England and New South Wales has been well documented by Andrew Moore in the first Tom Brock Lecture, and I was reminded of it when reviewing four books on the Olympic City for the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1999. Geoffrey Moorhouse’s portrait of Sydney had insights not normally found in the work of outsiders, and it was obvious that because he came from a rugby league background in the north of England he had a special entree into the character and drama of what he found here.

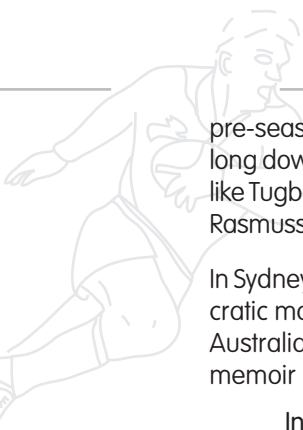
Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of immigrants to Sydney came from a soccer background and the question has often been raised about the low popularity of that code in what should have been a natural habitat. Foxes and rabbits had no trouble adapting, so why not the round-ball game? It is, after all, the great love of the English working classes who formed so much of the character of old Sydney. Rugby philosopher V. J. Carroll has put forward the view that in the cobblestoned streets of London and Birmingham it was necessary to play a game in which the players used their feet and remained on their feet, and that tackling sports were

the province of rich private schools with extensive and well-maintained playing fields. In Sydney there was a lot more space and soft landings on the green fields of the sprawling city, and so all classes took to rugby. Those who have tried to sink a thumb into the surface of the WACA in Perth and broken a nail will know they play Rules in WA, just as those who have sunk a thumb up to the wrist in Eden Park, Auckland, realise instinctively they are in a rugby country. This is of course a general view and it should be noted that there is no record of the theory being tested at North Sydney Oval, where until the 1987 renovation, rock met clay in a form of cement.

South of the Barassi Line, in Victoria, where the grass is grey, the ground is hard and the horses run anti-clockwise, it was a different story. Australian Rules is a nineteenth century game, more open, free-flowing and egalitarian, in which the players mostly stay on their feet, and belongs, according to Robert Pascoe, to the more modern and democratic society to be found down there in the Land of the Long White Posts. He cites the greater numbers of women who are interested in the game as evidence of this, saying that they were greater participants in the political movements of the day, and puts forward the view that Rules was more multi-cultural. This ignores the significant interest Sydney women have in rugby league, and particularly in the St George club during the unbroken premiership years. Some of them looked like Elizabeth Taylor, some like Ken Kearney, but all knew their football and were not afraid of speaking their minds. Who could forget that



Queenslanders and the southern media.



pre-season game at Henson Park in the sixties when Elton Rasmussen, not long down from Queensland, took a breather? A large woman with a voice like Tugboat Annie was sitting in the grandstand and called out 'Rasmussen, Rasmussen, stop bludging on the blind'. He did it again, but only once again.

In Sydney at the turn of the century all classes played rugby and the democratic movements that swept Victoria were not unknown here. As former Australian rugby union captain Herbert 'Paddy' Moran says in his classic memoir *Viewless Winds*:

In 1904, Amateur Rugby was still a game for all the classes — just as it is today in Wales. There were no social distinctions, nor any systematic professionalism ... Those who later become professionals changed their status, not as a rule from any dire necessity, but out of a desire to gain their living more pleasantly. It was they themselves who created a social discrimination in Australian Rugby.

However the creation of the rugby league in 1908 is interpreted, it was an act that was decisive in the history and education of Sydney. It involved twentieth century notions of insurance, workers' compensation for injury and loss of earnings, had political echoes, and was influenced by commercialism to the degree that the first premiership was won by forfeit following a dispute on potential gate receipts. It also had the effect of tying the game into the inner city heart, while rugby union became more the province of the quieter suburbs which were blue-ribbon anti-Labor seats. Some would doubtless say thus began the beanies/leather patches social divide. The rule changes — dropping two players, no line-outs, and above all retaining the ball in the tackle — were designed to make the game more attractive to the spectator, but they had the bonus of making it easier for beginners, and within five years rugby league had become a school sport and subsequently a lifelong interest for many Sydney-siders.

On a grey day in the weathershed at my primary school in 1954 we boys were addressed by Arthur Folwell, chairman of selectors for the Australian Rugby League, and he was a very impressive figure with a green and gold coat of arms on both his blazer and hatband. He told us what a great game league was and hoped we would all play it and send a good team to the schools carnival. In 1955 I made the firsts — or should I say 'the onlys' — and we played in the carnival, being duly weighed, stamped, given a pie and then saw ourselves beaten in the semi-final by the toss of a coin after a nil-all draw.

I was not the only bandy-legged winger running around in 1955; there

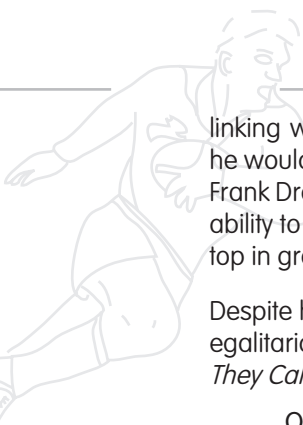
was a much more famous one called Don Adams and it was a big thrill when my aunt took me and a friend to see France versus New South Wales at the SCG in 1955 along with 50,445 others on a bright Saturday afternoon. Here the score was much higher than nil-all; it was 29-24 for the home side against the great French team led by Jackie Merquey. As E. E. Christensen notes in the 1956 *Rugby League Year Book*:

Merquey gave one of the classiest displays seen from a centre in years. He drew the defence perfectly and gave his fellow centre Rey ample opportunities. Merquey scored two tries and generally his play was most inspiring.

The 1951 side had beaten Australia 2-1, led by their explosive players Puig-Aubert and the second-rowers Brousse and Ponsinet, described by one careless authority as 'Brussenay and Ponce'. The 1955 tourists were of course called 'the unpredictable Frenchmen', but under the strong leadership of Jackie Merquey they won the series by the same margin and made many friends with their open play and multi-cultural infusion, which included shooting ducks with a shanghai at Kippax Lake and serving up the result as caneton roti à l'orange. The hotel where they stayed, the 1909 yellow-tile Olympic in Paddington, is now classified by the National Trust and looks a lot better than it did in the fifties, unlike, alas, the current French side.

In 1955 there was no television and the 1950s did not represent the high point in the Australian film industry — with all respect to 'The Siege of Pinchgut'. The Sydney Cricket Ground offered drama in the afternoon and we saw the star performers of the day — 'Bandy' Adams heading for the corner with the crowd on its feet as soon as he touched the ball, the Frenchman Jean Dop who did the opposite and ran in circles that left defenders with dizzy spells and the crowd with delirium, and above all, Clive Churchill Superstar. When you looked at a football field with 26 players on it you looked to Churchill first, just to get a bearing and to feel the sense that something was about to happen. With a high surf of black hair, rolled-up sleeves and shortish left-foot kick, there was no trouble locating him as he drifted across to set up his wingers, the locomotive-like Adams and, when available, the finely-tuned Ian Moir. Like Wally Lewis he carried an invisible force field that seemed to say 'Don't tackle me. Hold off until I do something that will really damage you.'

Today's running fullback like David Peachey is a Churchill legacy, although one curious link is the Aboriginality — unacknowledged in CC's case, bruited by Peachey in a changed Sydney — of both players. Outkicked by Puig-Aubert in 1951, Churchill developed the running game and the



linking with wingers as a counter, and the defence never knew where he would emerge. It was not until the pivotal year of 1962, however, that Frank Drake became the first fullback to score a Test match try. Peachey's ability to pick the moment and score plenty of tries has taken him to the top in grade football but not into the test match arena.

Despite his flair for publicity and innovation, Churchill was every inch the egalitarian Sydney version of the star, however, and in his autobiography *They Called Me the Little Master*, he recalls a great moment from 1950:

One evening, a week before the Australian team for the First Test was selected, I happened to be in my new home at Mascot, tacking down the carpets. One of my friends, Billy Winspear, knocked on the door. 'Clive', he said, 'I have just heard over the air you have been selected in the Test team. I've also heard you have been appointed Test captain.'

They don't write dialogue like that any more! In fact, this book is subtitled 'Clive Churchill's Colourful Story as told to Jim Mathers' and it ranks with *10 for 66 and All That* by Waterloo-born cricketer Arthur Mailey as both a sports classic and an unforgettable social record of Sydney. The 'as-told-to' man Jim Mathers was a tabloid journalist and a master of the idiom of rugby league in the days when Sydney streets were alive with the shouts of the fruit barrow boys and its legendary newspaper sellers. Many of us remember the bustling, spindly woman with the floppy hat and pointed chin working the cars at the beginning of Victoria Road in Balmain, or Wynyard's Quick-Draw McGraw in brown horn-rims and a grey dust-coat, who could get a *Sun* or *Mirror* under your arm in .005 seconds. The most inspiring character was the newsboy at the Quay who wore a pork-pie hat and had thigh stumps for legs, and who alternated between cheery banter with his regulars or periods of yelling out 'Getya Sunamirror here!' He did not wear a UCLA tank top or turn into Captain Marvel Junior; he wore a football jersey. It had to be a league one and it had to be Souths, and it said to all tourists: 'This is Sydney'.

In television terms, the battle between the *Sun* and the *Mirror*, between the *Herald* and the *Telegraph*, resolved itself into the long-running war, Channel Seven's Controversy Corner up against 'The World of Sport' on Nine. I was entranced by these spielers and blarney merchants, the direct descendants of salesmen, auctioneers, politicians, scrap metal collectors, bottle-ohs and rabbitohs, who had a licence not to be laconic, and I wrote a play, *The Roy Murphy Show*, about this phenomenon of the rugby league television panel. The central three characters, the garrulous host, the crusty veteran and the smart young journalist were called Roy Murphy,

Clarrie Maloney and Mike Conolly, and they represented three forces in the game which have waxed and waned in different ways — showbiz, tradition and independent analysis.



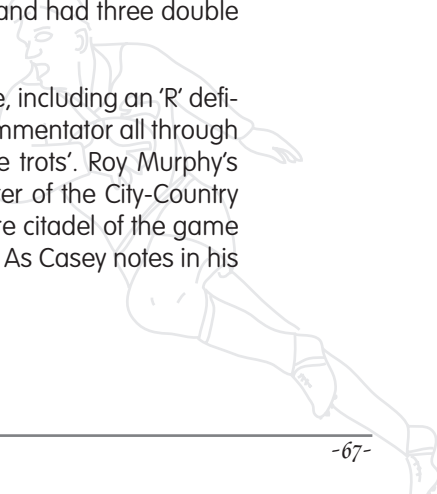
In *Rugby League Week*, on 23 July 1971, the Nimrod Theatre production of *The Roy Murphy Show* became the first play to be reviewed by that distinguished organ. Under the headline ‘Stand Up the Weal Wan Casey’, Mike Woollcott speculated on the identity of the central character in these terms:

Roy Murphy — how it stretches the imagination that a man with such a fine Irish name or with the initials R.M. could be a pontificator on Greater Sydney’s national game — has

as his antagonist Clarrie Maloney, who, Roy tells us, is heard on another medium and who has antiquated views. (*Rugby League Week*, p.5)

I’m sure that after exactly thirty years it can be revealed that the critic who wrote that, Mike Woollcott, was a pseudonym for one of Australia’s hardest-working and most authoritative journalists, Mike Pollak, and that the real Ron Casey did come to see the play and had three double whiskies straight afterwards.

The Case, as he was known, had a distinctive voice, including an ‘R’ deficiency, but he walked the tightrope as a sports commentator all through that era when harness racing was known as ‘the trots’. Roy Murphy’s antagonist, Clarrie Maloney, was a great supporter of the City-Country game, but Roy felt Sydney was the once-and-future citadel of the game and that the ‘annual farce’ should be abandoned. As Casey notes in his autobiography *Confessions of a Larrikin*:





L-R Mike Gibson, Rex Mossop and Norman May.

The Saturday and Sunday football panels on Channels Nine and Seven were part of Sydney folklore in the 70s ... If Nine's panel, with me as host, has cast lingering memories, it must be because of the on-camera slanging matches between myself and fellow Irishman Frank Hyde. (COAL, p. 92)

As commentator for 2SM, the 'other medium' that rankled with The Case, Frank Hyde was the nice guy of rugby league and a target for all larrikins, confessional or otherwise. In the last round of 1961, North Sydney's valiant fullback Brian Carlson — occasionally accused of being too low-key—played all over the field like three men in a 33-13 loss to St George which meant no semi-final berth for the Bears and another minor premiership for the Saints.

'For his outstanding display here today', said Frank Hyde over the new transistor radios of a hundred fans, 'I picked Brian Carlson as the best and fairest'. The reply from a St George fan walking in front of me was loud and immediate: 'You couldn't pick your nose, Frank'. The unhurried Carlson had been the epitome of Fifties Cool, a running contrast to the hot leadership of Clive Churchill, and he had created almost as many tries for Ken Irvine as the Little Master did for Ian Moir, but by 1962 both of these great fullbacks had retired and, sadly, did not survive the 1980s to be become Grand Old Men. Frank Hyde's tribute was appreciated in some quarters, and certainly in retrospect.



Tautologist in the dock.

Hyde's equivalent on Channel Seven was everybody's favourite uncle Ferris Ashton, who played the veteran role to Rex Mossop in the lead, with Alan Clarkson as the smart journalist. This central dynamic has since disappeared from sports programs in the era of the Footy Show's all-player panel, plus pies and frocks, but all over Sydney in the seventies people made jokes about Controversy Corner's avowal to air 'pertinent league matters' and during the passing competition speculated on what was causing the tormented cries of the Commonwealth

Bank elephant. We now know the answer: the Commonwealth Bank. But those were more innocent days, where Saturday morning meant a hangover, poached eggs and 'Wan' in black and white.

The Nimrod production of the play had been an excellent one, with John Clayton, John Wood and Martin Harris as the central trio and Jacki Weaver in the role of the generous hostess; just as Sydney had become the university of rugby league, so it was becoming the place where actors came to hone their skills under pressure. Outside Sydney *The Roy Murphy Show* suffered from mixed perceptions. It has never been performed in the Adelaide-Melbourne-Hobart triangle, partly because the characters were seen as Woolloomooloo Yankees, and partly because the idea of satire in the football context is a very tricky issue. In Melbourne it is possible to be irreverent about Australian Rules, but the irreverence must be reverential. It was also impossible to dramatise the overkill inherent in their panel shows; in Sydney the magic number of panellists was five, whereas eight was the norm down south. They put 36 players on the field and need three commentators and two umpires to handle all the traffic. Victorians also use 15 percent more words to express a thought, and those who accused Frank Hyde of blarneyfication do not know the half of it. To make things even more confusing Victoria's Channel 7 had its own Ron Casey, who hosted the the World of Sport but did not have a lisp and did not answer to 'Wan'.



ROY MURPHY	.....	JOHN CLAYTON	.....	GERMANY	.....	JACKI WEAVER
CLARKE	.....	MARTIN HARRIS	.....	WHIRMA	.....	ETHEL WELSH
WRE	.....	JOHN WOOD	.....	FRISK	.....	JOHN WOOD
SAMUEL T. BOB	.....	ANDREW McLENNAN	.....	KEVIN	.....	MARTIN HARRIS
CHARLES ROHMER	.....	ANDREW McLENNAN	.....	FRAN WANDERING WAGLE	.....	ANDREW McLENNAN
'CIRCUA' ARISTORING	.....	HARLICE COOBY	.....	CARON LEE	.....	ANDREW McLENNAN
STARGON	.....	JACKI WEAVER	.....	BO SCOP	.....	JOHN CLAYTON
				HEW	.....	JACKI WEAVER
				VALMAI	.....	JACKI WEAVER
				HOW LARK	.....	ETHEL WELSH

STAGE DIRECTOR	.....	LARRY EASTWOOD	PHOTOGRAPHER	.....	ROBERT WALKER
PROSCENE	.....	ROBIN JONES	FOUNDER PROGRAMME	.....	TERRY MUGGERIDGE
CREDITS	.....	SOUNDSTATE (Ray Hepburn)	.....	LANE TULLOCH	

Sparring words suggested by MARK DIMONDON, "The House of Sport" (Haymarket Club) for "Who Keeps 'em All Laughin'" (Pittwater 15 Pty. Ltd. Office and Industrial Club, Manlyville, N.S.W. and FRANK BURNETT'S RESTAURANT, CANTINE, Belmont, Pittwater, for the 1976 THIRD WORLD BOOKSHOP, Glebeville St. The activities of Nimrod Street Theatre involve assistance from the Australia Council for the Arts.



Membership of Melburnian Keith Dunstan's Anti-Football League was never audited, but the figure is believed to have always been less than two, which gives some idea of the religious fervour attached to the southern game; the convivial scepticism of the Sydney league fan is simply not part of the landscape. I had several interesting and at times hilarious discussions with theatre managements in Melbourne about presenting *The Roy Murphy Show* either as it was, or adapted to the local scene, but it was agreed that the first alternative would induce revulsion and the second was impossible.

In Newcastle the production included John Cootes, making his debut in the entertainment industry as the footballer of the week Brian 'Chicka' Armstrong, but the box office return was disappointing. It was only in Perth and Brisbane, on a double bill with Jack Hibberd's Les Darcy play that *The Roy Murphy Show*, played as straight comedy, ran for a good long season. When the



Marcus Cooney as Chicka, Martin Harris as Clarrie, Jacki Weaver as Sharon and John Clayton as Roy Murphy, Nimrod Street Theatre production, 1971.
Photo: Robert Walker

play was produced in London by Steve Jacobs and Helen Philipp in 1983 almost every critic saw it as a satire on the Australian obsession with sport. Australian! How little do they know of those subtle differences that percolate down through history and all the way from Redfern to Jolimont.

People started sending me commentary and spectator gems after the play had been on and I became a kind of recorder of the more bizarre outreaches of rugby league literature, giving the spoken word a rough permanence. I was even rung by panellists from 'The World of Sport' and 'Controversy Corner', who were not averse to shopping their colleagues. When Rex Mossop turned from ball distribution to word distribution and, in this era before whistle blower legislation came in, began calling the games on television the trickle of items became a torrent of rhetoric. Commentators have always had signature phrases, such as American baseball caller Mel Allen's home run shout 'Open the window, Aunt Minnie!' With King Rex you knew a try was coming when he bellowed 'Shut the gate, the horse has bolted'. Neither phrase will stand up to any kind of logical

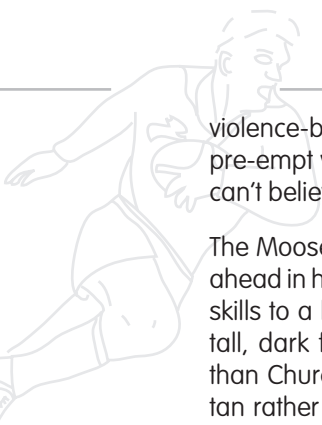
explanation, but were part of the light verbiage of sport. No one knew at that stage just how important the media were to become.

Channel Seven won the rights to telecast league in 1974 and with the advent of colour television in 1975, plus an equally colourful commentator, the game became a mass entertainment on what we never called 'Freda Ware'. Who was this strange woman Freda Ware? It was not for 20 years that the terms 'pay television' and 'free-to-air' were to cause the biggest impact on the game since 1908, but the ball started rolling in 1975, especially in the area of personality and commentary that reached beyond the hard-core fan. In the days of the *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist Tom Goodman, master of the style without style, action was conveyed to the reader's mind with a minimum of well-chosen, single-duty words and phrases. On Channel Seven we got the action, plus the description, plus the style that some called Double Bunger.

From 1977 to 1983 I ran a tautology tournament in the *National Times* which was open to all comers from sport, politics, science, the arts, industry, anywhere. All contestants had to do was come up with a piece of tautology like 'free gift', 'added bonus', 'strict disciplinarian' or 'forward progress'. Rex Mossop won every year, and that was what the fans wanted, however much I tried to boost the claims of Bob Hawke, Ita Buttrose or Norman May. They were just crazy for Rex, even south of the Barassi Line, even in the Croweater Capital, and when I signed copies of the book in Perth people presented me with lists of their favourite tauts, with many Mossopisms among them. His language of league became catch-phrases in general society and people took great delight in saying 'Give him a verbal tongue-lashing, let me recapitulate back to what happened previously, he seems to have suffered a groin injury at the top of his leg, they're going laterally across field, that kick had both height and elevation, I've never seen him live in the flesh, there he is, hopping on one leg, what a pity — he's been a positive asset, they've been going on about it ad nauseam — that means forever, I've had to switch my mental thinking, I'm sick and tired of all this



Rex Mossop wins the 1977 Pennant.



violence-bashing, that referee's got glaucoma of the eyes, I don't want to pre-empt what I've already said, I don't want to sound incredulous but I can't believe it.'

The Moose did not deserve his nick-name as he did not charge straight ahead in his playing days, but rather introduced English-style ball-playing skills to a bash-and-barge ethos. He was not thanked. I remember the tall, dark figure at Brookvale Oval with his sleeves rolled even higher than Churchill's, above the elbow, suggesting a lair working on his sun tan rather than a worker, and running at gaps before passing the ball. Some elements in the crowd booed when he did this, believing it was more macho to run at an opponent and die with the ball, but Australia paid the price in 1962 when the great distributor Brian McTigue put on a master class in geometry and Great Britain won the series 2-1. Australia's dominance in world league began in 1963 with Billy Wilson and then Ian Walsh helping out by doing something of a McTigue up front and Johnny Raper keeping the kettle boiling for a very fast set of backs. They defeated Great Britain 28-2 in the First Test and 50-12 in the Second. Of course, then it was a case of 'Tha won't win third, lad', and so it proved, but those 78 points in two matches were the watershed. From now on, players would regard Sydney as the headquarters of rugby league.

When Sixty Minutes was making a profile of Rex Mossop for their national audience they asked me to come on camera with a copy of The Rexicon. I replied that there was no such thing, that it was just a name for a certain kind of tautological idiom, that it was an abstract concept. 'We don't do abstract on "Sixty Minutes"', was the forthright answer and they got me to mock up a ledger containing all of Thesaurus Rex's linguistic sins and then confront him with it on camera. As television entertainment this Rexicon business was the equivalent of watching a dentist at work. Rex Mossop was an innovative ball player and a grand showman whom Noel Kelly has described as living one of the great Australian lives. It was a pity his drab and querulous autobiography, *The Moose that Roared*, is at not at the same end of the scale of rugby league literature as Kelly's own *Hard Man*, or the benchmark, *They Called Me the Little Master*, with its wonderful evocation of Sydney in 1950.

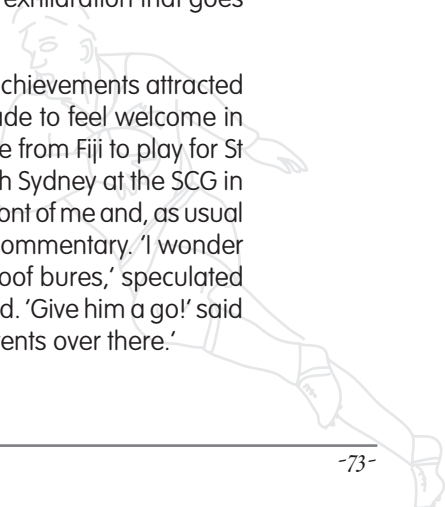
Chapter Twenty of this masterpiece of its kind begins when Clive Churchill drives his parents to the SCG gates and escorts them to the queue for the First Test against England at 6 a.m., wearing his pyjamas, dressing gown and slippers, and ends with a delirious and mud-caked mob surrounding him after the Third Test Ashes victory, including one spectator with a pair of pliers busy removing a stud from his boot. In the great tradition of

being in the know, another came up to his mother and said 'I know Clive Churchill well. As a matter of fact I knew him when he was only two years old, toddling around Mascot.' The Little Master was not a big man, but he was 20 when he moved from Newcastle to Mascot to toddle around for the Rabbitohs in the big league (*Little Master*, pp. 118f). Along with Jack Rayner he quickly became a 'stalwart' at the team they called 'Souse'.

The Australian accent began in old Sydney among the Currency Lads during the Macquarie era of the early nineteenth century and spread out over the country before becoming regionalised, and then consciously non-Sydney. Seen as a raffish capital with rather too much in the way of violence and corruption, and certainly way too many raffs, poor old El Syd began to be looked at rather askance by the rest of the country, and its dominant sport was called 'Thugby League'. This was a pity, as the escalation in ball skills and pace of play in the 1990s was making this one of the greatest tests of athleticism, courage, deception, fitness and vision on offer in world sport.

The game reached its high-water mark in 1994, according to Ken Arthurson, and I recall a typically glorious David Peachey try in the Cronulla-Newcastle semi-final that involved a giant sweeping movement, decoy runners and long passing against an equally determined and fanned-out defence, leaving chess, Vince Lombardi and basketball in the shade, and inspiring a standing, cheering crowd, including a friend from south of the Barassi Line. 'That's about as good as ball play can get, I think', I said and he readily agreed, despite having reservations about both rugby league and the Coathanger Capital that has nurtured it. Teddy Roosevelt said of America 'I fear we shall never be loved', and the same could be said of Sydney and its culture, especially those attached to the league, that ancient outdoor drama of defending and appropriating property, of punishment and reward, of paying homage to skill and theft and the exhilaration that goes beyond all logical bounds.

Despite the negatives, the pace of the city and its achievements attracted players from all over the world and they were made to feel welcome in the traditional democratic ways. Johnny Fifita came from Fiji to play for St George and when the Dragons were playing North Sydney at the SCG in 1989 a couple of the opposition fans were sitting in front of me and, as usual with Saints followers, disagreeing with the radio commentary. 'I wonder if Johnny Fifita grew up in one of those thatched-roof bures,' speculated Peter Peters on 2GB. The St George couple exploded. 'Give him a go!' said one directly to the radio, 'The boongs don't live in tents over there.'



Another cry from the heart at Grizzle Park



'Where have all the Bears gone?' asks the author at an empty North Sydney Oval.

While the natural predators of league looked to be the perennial 'sleeping giant' of soccer and the somewhat flighty Sydney Swans, no one seemed to notice what was happening with the amateurish rugby union fraternity, which since the democratic days of Paddy Moran had come to be called 'the rah rahs', a term from America's Ivy League, according to Professor Gerry Wilkes, derived from the 'hurrah hurrah' sounds made by those keen young Preppies at the Yale-Harvard game. It took a long while to sink in, but taking their cue from the events of 1908, rugby union reduced the teams, made the balls easier to retain, the game easier to teach beginners, paid the players (enabling them to 'gain their living more pleasantly'), favoured coaches and even fullbacks with the running game, persuaded referees to go easy on the whistle, encouraged tribal support and came up with the Super 12 format.

In the best-selling novel of the 1990s, *The Ya-Ya Sisterhood* made their name by disrupting a beauty contest with stink bombs, and the impact of the new breed of Rah-Rah Brotherhood has had a similar effect on Sydney's long-running love affair with rugby league with their huge crowds for the Bledisloe Cup, where nations at war seems to occupy a bigger canvas than suburbs at war having a punch-up. There are increasing signs of strain and embattlement all round the game of league, in ways that did not exist during the happy monopoly of only a few years ago. North Sydney's greatest victory, 15-14 over the Brisbane Broncos in the 1994 finals series, was set on its way by Greg Florimo with his refusal to be overawed and the early try he scored in typically impatient style. Everyone loved Flo and they rejoiced in the triumph, if not the eventual success, of the Bears. When

I remarked that Craig Polla-Mounter's heroic performance for the Bulldogs against Parramatta in the 1998 finals was in the same class for spirit and will to win, I was howled down by league traditionalists. 'Canterbury were Super-League, Polla-Mounter's from Queensland, he ratted on both the rah-rahs and Phillip Street, they probably didn't even want to be on Freda Ware, Murdoch owns them, remember Pearl Harbour' and so on. What a wedge those hectic days of the 1995 pay-television war have driven!

What will the future bring for Sydney and rugby league? People mumble about demographic change and say the taxi drivers no longer talk about 'pertinent league matters', but still it holds on, and there was a red and green river of beanies overrunning the wigs in Macquarie Street when Souths went to court fighting to keep the people's game alive. Sydney is the only place in the world where rugby league has inspired political street marches, but could it happen elsewhere? The only other million-plus city in the world where league remains the dominant code lies to our north. Perhaps we can look forward to a spirited and well argued 'Brisbane: Heart of Rugby League' at a future Tom Brock Lecture. It would be a case of stripping the ball, but at least this time it would be one on one.





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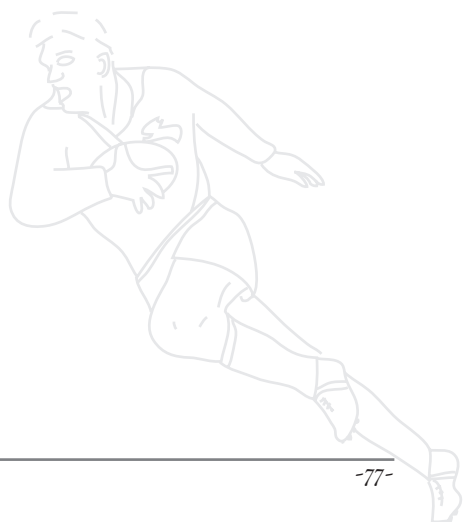
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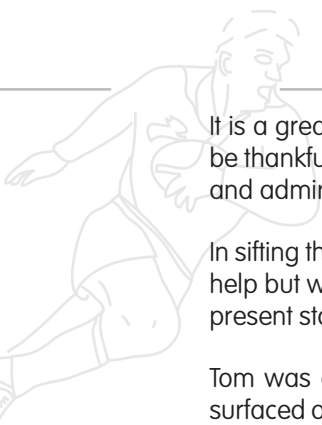
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The Changing Face of Rugby League

22 August 2002,
South Sydney Leagues Club, Redfern

Alan Clarkson OAM





It is a great privilege to be invited to be part of the evening to recall and be thankful for a man of Tom Brock's ability as one of the great historians and admirers of the rugby league game.

In sifting through a mountain of records to prepare for tonight, I could not help but wonder if Tom was still with us, if he would be happy about the present state of the game.

Tom was always the gentleman, but some of the problems that have surfaced over the last couple of years would undoubtedly have tested the patience of even this wonderful person.

Tom and I had one thing in common, we were involved in rugby league when it was a game ... and not a business as it is these days.

Rugby league has faced, and survived countless dramas over its history and I have no doubt the Canterbury Bulldogs cheating, which exploded on the league scene, will rank up there with some of the biggest scandals in our time.

As far as the most important people in the game ... the public ... are concerned, the fact that Canterbury abused the salary cap system has nearly the same impact as the introduction of the four tackle rule in 1967 and the takeover by Super League in 1995.

Following the initial revelation talkback radio was deluged with calls on the subject with most wanting blood and for Canterbury to lose enough points to prevent them playing in the semi-finals.

In his straight from his shoulder style, Mike Gibson in his column in the *Daily Telegraph* wrote:

As revelations unfold, as the ethical standards of the Canterbury administration are left in tatters, you can't help but ask how many other people in Rugby League were aware of what was happening. The Bulldog players plead ignorance but what about their managers? How about this mob who have emerged in recent years, squeezing every buck they can out of the game for their clients and themselves. They know where the honey pot is and obviously they were never going to dump on the Canterbury club or any other club rotting the system.

The NRL unfortunately is in a no-win situation and whatever action it takes in the crisis will be wrong in the eyes of some but realistically it cannot ignore the confession of the Canterbury club that they exceeded the salary cap ... CASE CLOSED.

But what about the dedicated army of Bulldog supporters who have been drooling at the prospect of cheering their team on that unforgettable victory lap on grand final day. Using the word, unfortunately again, they will have to wait for next season for the very basic reason the club cheated and they have to pay a very heavy price.

Ray Chesterton, in his article in the *Daily Telegraph*, put it well, as usual, when he wrote:

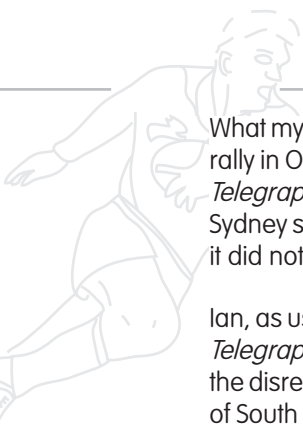
In 48 hours, the Bulldogs have gone from glorious to notorious, their ambitions this season crippled by the arrogant disregard for ethics, integrity, fair play and sportsmanship on their salary cap breaches.

While we can jump up and down because of what has happened, let us hope the NRL will keep a keen eye on the other clubs because there is little doubt that a number of them could be in breach of the salary cap.

It won't come as a surprise to many that I have been a great admirer of Souths for many years, and like so many, I was devastated when they were omitted from the premiership competition by those who have no idea of the wonderful history of the club, and as I suggested earlier, it was further proof that rugby league was no longer a sport but a business.



One of the sights which caused some worry in the opposition ranks. Souths great second rower, Bob McCarthy, about to hit top gear in a match against Manly.



What my good friend, Ian Heads suffered in the lead up to that magnificent rally in October 2001 was appalling. He had written a story for the *Sunday Telegraph* about the fight for life by Souths and their march through the Sydney streets on that Sunday but the story was spiked probably because it did not fit into News Limited thoughts.

Ian, as usual, showed his class by resigning from his role with the *Sunday Telegraph* because of what he termed a 'seriously slanted approach and the disrespect shown to a club with the background and incredible history of South Sydney'.

I make no apologies for the fact that I am a blast from the past and while there are some really superb players in the game now, and they deserve the accolades they receive, I believe I was involved in the finest era of the code and the mind boggles to try and estimate what Johnny Raper, Reg Gasnier, Graeme Langlands, Ron Coote and the incredible Clive Churchill would earn these days.

My interest in Souths really started when the club signed Clive Churchill, a genius of a footballer and a great friend off the field.

I went to the same school as Clive, at Marist Brothers, Hamilton, and even in his early teens, he had that very special aura about him. I remember one year he was a key figure in the Dodd Shield team which was a school competition for players 9 stone and under. Clive was the dominant player, especially in the final and for good measure kicked goals from all over the field, barefooted.

The team won the Dodd Shield and Clive was named in the 8 stone team for the premiership decider the following week and, despite the howls of protest from the opposition coach, Clive played and once again, he was brilliant.

When he came down to join Souths I was at his first match and when he came out on the field after halftime, I bellowed 'Good on you Tigger' which was his nickname at school and he knew there was a Novocastrian there to support him.

Not that Clive needed any support. As you know as well as I do, he was an incredible footballer, brilliant in attack and devastating in defence.

The tackling skill was learned at school from Brother Lucian, the football coach who drove home to his players the need to tackle low in what he

One of the greatest. Clive Churchill in a typical burst with Len Cowie backing him up.



termed 'daisy cutters' and this lesson was something Clive carried through his superb career with one famous exception.

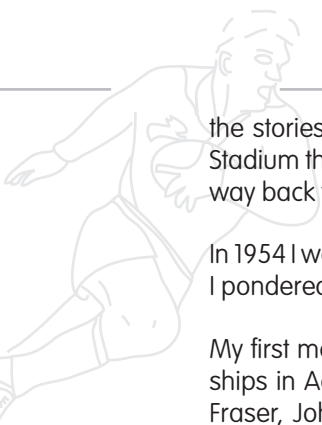
That was in 1955 when he suffered a broken wrist in a match against Manly when he attempted to tackle an opposition player a little high. In those days there were no substitutes so Clive strapped his wrist at half time with some cardboard and went back out for the second half.

He played his usual involved game and for good measure kicked the winning goal for a desperately needed victory. Souths went on to win the premiership, their third in succession after they were back in second last place on the competition table after the first match in the second round. A loss in any of the last 11 games would have put them out of the running.

In the last months of his life my Sporting Editor suggested I should write an obituary and have it ready for the inevitable but a couple of weeks later I suggested it would be nice to run the piece so Clive could read it and thankfully he agreed.

We sent out a photographer and Clive, as usual, co-operated walking along Coogee beach to give some graphic pictorial impact to the story which did win the league award for the best feature story of the season.

My journalistic career began with an organisation called Australian United Press which was a press agency supplying news to country papers. It was a marvellous training area because in one working day, for example a Monday, I could be covering an industrial court case, re-writing some of



the stories from the afternoon papers, reporting on the fight at Sydney Stadium that evening and then calling into the NSW Rugby League on the way back to the office to pick up what happened at the meeting.

In 1954 I was approached by the *Sydney Morning Herald* to join them and I pondered about that for roughly a tenth of a second before agreeing.

My first major assignment was at the Australian Swimming Championships in Adelaide in 1955 where I met such great champions as Dawn Fraser, John Devitt, Jon Henricks, Murray Rose and Lorraine Crapp to name just a few.

The following year I was one of the sporting scribes at the Melbourne Olympics and our staff was about 25 which included copytakers and car drivers. For the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, the Fairfax organisation had hundreds running round, but I suppose that comes under the category of progress.

I covered another two Olympic Games for the *Herald* and the *Sun-Herald* at Rome in 1960 and Tokyo four years later and for the Sydney Olympics I had the privilege of being one of the media liaison officers helping with tennis, taekwondo, table tennis and shooting. These sports earned Australia two gold, three silver and one bronze medal.

It is not everyone who can regard, as a day's work, covering a rugby league grand final, or a Davis Cup match or a rugby league Test match



As the captain says, Ken Kearney leads his players off the field. In the background (from the left) are Bob Bugden, Harry Bath, Brian Clay and Brian Graham.

in England on a Kangaroo tour, or perhaps the final of the Olympic 1500 metres event in Rome in 1960 or Dawn Fraser winning her third successive 100 metres freestyle gold medal in Tokyo in 1964 or that great lady, Betty Cuthbert, winning the 400 metres running event in Tokyo.

I have been fortunate enough to have reported on all of those events and a lot more, and when I was going over some books, it sank home again just how lucky I have been to have more than 35 years involved in so many areas of sport and to have made so many wonderful friends, not only in sport but in various areas of the media.

Actually I am very lucky to be here. In Rome, one Saturday afternoon I covered the swimming and the late Ernie Christensen went along to the Tony Madigan-Cassius Clay fight. Ernie's room was directly opposite mine and he was tapping out his story when I returned and I asked him how the fight went and Ernie shocked me when he said that Tony had squibbed it and I told him I couldn't believe that.

At that stage Madigan, who was in Ernie's room, poked his head around the door and said 'Gooday Clarko'. When I went into my room the realisation hit me, all I had to do was agree with what Ernie said and I would have been in the intensive ward at the nearest hospital.

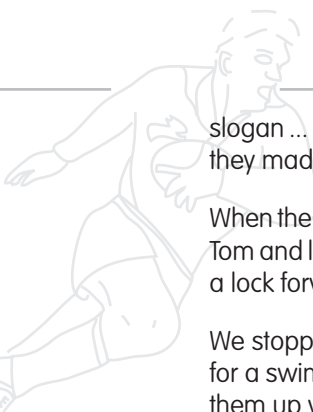
One of the most important and welcome moves of my career came in the early 1960s when I was assigned to be Tom Goodman's understudy. I had been involved in helping to cover league as a third string behind Tom and George Thatcher.

At the risk of being biased again, and I admit I am when I talk about this man, there has never been a finer sporting journalist than Tom Goodman, a man who loved all sport and particularly those he covered with such distinction, rugby league and cricket.

Tom worked on the principle of boosting ... and not knocking ... and I am certain you could count on the fingers of one hand the number of times he criticised a player's performance. The toughest criticism he made was something along the lines of 'Joe Blow did not play as well as he usually does'.

In essence, Tom told his readers what actually went on in the match and his advice to me was basic: 'Don't try and con the public, they know as much about the game as we do'.

In the years I was Tom's assistant and for years after, I never heard one disparaging remark about him, or his work. To borrow a rugby league



slogan ... he was simply the best and the league acknowledged this when they made him a life member.

When the 1958 Great Britain team arrived in Sydney I was at the airport with Tom and later I took the manager, Tom Mitchell, prop forward Ab Terry and a lock forward named Vince Karalius for a tour around the beaches.

We stopped at Maroubra and the tourists decided they would like to go for a swim. I knew the man in charge of the dressing sheds and he fixed them up with costumes.

Karalius started to go out through the waves and I became a little concerned and asked one of the Maroubra lifesavers to go out on his ski and keep an eye on him.

Had I known what damage Karalius would do to the Australian team I would have tried to entice a couple of sharks to come in but Vince was so tough there would have been no guarantee about the outcome.

Tom Goodman retired and I was appointed the chief league writer for the *Herald* and the *Sun-Herald* and my first overseas assignment was the 1967 Kangaroo tour to England and France.

After that tour I went on three others, in 1978, 1986 and 1990, the World Cup in 1970 and a tour to New Zealand in 1969 and in a change of pace I was tour leader in 1994 for 42 dedicated league followers which included Kerry Boustead's mother and father.



*Noel Kelly,
in a typical
burst, charges
into the Great
Britain line-up.*

In 1967 the team was stationed at a magnificent village, Ilkley Moor, but realistically it was not the venue for 28 footballers and half a dozen media people for six weeks. To put it politely as I can, the hotel was appalling. After the first couple of days two of the toilets did not work and there was a rush to get back from training because only the first dozen or so could have the luxury of a hot bath ... and then that was it for the hot water.

In this dreary pub, there were no showers except for the one devised and installed by Allan Thomson.

One of the really special areas in the hotel was room 4 which housed Noel Kelly, John Sattler and Peter Gallagher and it was nicknamed Boy's Town.

On the first morning in the hotel, Manly winger Les Hanigan was given the task of being the duty boy which meant he had to do around the rooms and make sure everyone was up getting ready for breakfast and then be ready to head off for training.

Les bustled into Boy's Town and came backpeddling a lot faster than he went in with Kelly bellowing 'knock before you come in Meece'.

For Ned, anyone in the team who was not a forward was a Meece ... and they had to stay in the front part of the bus.

One afternoon, after politely knocking on the door of room 4 and being told to come in, I sat down on the one chair in the room and Kelly bellowed 'Clarko, get off that chair, that's my wardrobe'.



The Australian team that lost the First Test at Leeds on 21 October 1967. Australia won the following two Tests to secure the series.



Castleford versus Australia 1967.

Johnny Raper was back for the Third Test which Australia won 11-3 and before the match I walked across the Swinton ground with him. Chook was grinning because in the blizzard conditions there was ice on the ground.

It was an incredible tour but it looked doomed when we lost the first Test 16-11 and in the process two of our great players, Reg Gasnier and Johnny Raper, were badly injured and ruled out of the second Test at London's White City.

As if that wasn't bad enough, halfback Billy Smith was forced out with injury the day before the Second Test which meant that Tony Branson came in as five-eighth to oppose Roger Millward, and he finished a decisive points winner, with Johnny Gleeson switching to halfback.

In his first Test match, Ron Coote had a superb match, saving what seemed a certain try with a glorious covering tackle

of Ian Brooke and then wrapping up the Test with a try just two minutes from the end for a dramatic 17-11 win to level the series.

The Poms don't like these conditions. We'll tackle them and drive them into the ground and it will really worry them,' Chook said. What puzzled me was, if it worried the Poms, who were fairly used to those conditions, why wouldn't it concern our players. As it turned out Chook was right because the Kangaroos handled the pressure and the conditions magnificently and deserved to take home that Ashes trophy.

The tragedy of the tour was the finish of the career of the great Reg Gasnier. After fracturing his left leg in the First Test against Great Britain at Leeds, Gasnier worked hard for his comeback but, in a match against Young Hopefuls in Avignon, Gasnier was forced off the field in the second half and only 1,116 fans were there to see the wind up of a magnificent career.

Some time after we were back in Australia we heard the Ilkley Moor Hotel had been burnt down which meant a couple of hundred thousand mice and cockroaches were homeless.

On that tour there were so many unforgettable moments but one of the highlights came when we were in France and Mike Gibson and I spoke to that legend, Puig-Aubert. Mike made the point to Puig-Aubert that he did not like to tackle. 'Me, Tackle? Very small heart' he replied as he made a tiny circle with his thumb and forefinger and then placed it on the left side of his chest.

It has been well documented that when he discusses his on-field battles with our own legend, Clive Churchill, he tells it as it happened: 'He was there, I kicked the ball there'. What Puig-Aubert forgot to mention was that he had a great pack of forwards up front ... Brousse, Ponsinet and Mazon players who would be welcomed into any present-day club.

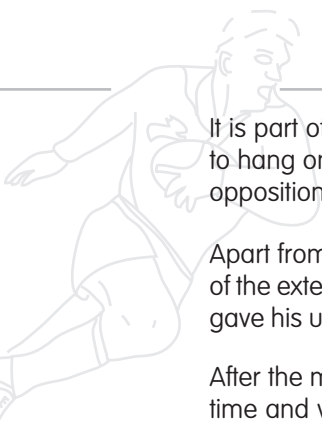


Despite an animated war-cry before the game, Australia lost 12-6 to Wigan. The Australian managers rated the refereeing in this match as the worst encountered on the tour.

One of the hazards of being in my profession is that there are occasions when you will be asked to pick the team you rate as the best, and that is like treading through a minefield especially when you consider some of the great teams we have been fortunate enough to see ... those incredible St George teams in their 11 year reign, Canberra's super win over Balmain in 1989 and the list goes on and on.

There was that heroic effort by Souths who won the 1955 premiership but my choice would be Souths' 23-12 win over Manly in the 1970 grand final at the Sydney Cricket Ground. Throughout the season, Souths produced quality consistent football, losing only four matches and from the team that year, there were ten players selected for international football while eight made the World Cup squad to England: Ron Coote as captain, Ray Branighan, Bob McCarthy, John O'Neill, Dennis Pittard, Paul Sait, Eric Simms and Elwyn Walters.

There would have been nine players on the tour but John Sattler suffered a double fracture of the jaw in the fifth minute of the grand final and he played on, and typically, he was in the thick of the action.



It is part of Souths' great history that Satts told two of his forward mates to hang on to him, not to let him fall down because he did not want the opposition know he was damaged.

Apart from the team and Souths' officials, no-one had the slightest idea of the extent of his injury and after receiving the premiership trophy, Satts gave his usual superb victory speech to the crowd.

After the match the media were kept out of the dressing room for some time and when we were finally allowed in, Satts was sitting in the bath with a sliver of blood trickling down his chin.

He asked Ian Heads and myself not to say anything about the fracture because he felt he could get through the medical examination if he was selected. But that evening, Satts was admitted to hospital and underwent an operation to repair the damage.

While on the subject of the 1970 World Cup, I have seen some tough bruising matches but nothing comes anywhere near the brutality of the final between Australia and Great Britain. The prime target for the Great Britain players was John O'Neill who had created mayhem in the earlier round clash with the team. Lurch was penalised and cautioned a number of times and at half time coach Harry Bath warned him that if there was another caution, he would be replaced.

The Great Britain players caught up with him in the final. He was held, punched and had his head stomped on but that did not bother him. All he could talk about after the match was the bravery of halfback Billy Smith in keeping on playing with a shin gashed after he had been raked in a play the ball.

I remember Lurch telling me he nearly 'threw up' when he saw the damage to Billy's leg.

Another little story from the 1970 era which indicates the difference between then and now ... in the Test in Brisbane between Australia and Great Britain, there was a difference of opinion between rival props, Jim Morgan and Cliff Watson, in one of the scrums. After the match, Jim was sitting on the concrete outside the Australian dressing room with his nose almost at right angles and with blood seeping down his explanation of the problem was wonderfully honest: 'I started it and Cliff finished it'. And as far as I was concerned this was another classic example of what happened on the field stayed there.

The other tours I have been on were great but there was that little bit of drama on the last day of the 1969 tour of New Zealand. One of our players caught a couple of locals going through the rooms pinching football jumpers and he went for them but there were too many of them.

We were all upstairs in the bar having a milkshake or whatever else they served there when he came up the stairs, with his shirt partially ripped off. Satts, the team captain for the tour, led the charge down the stairs and they caught up with the scavengers in the car park.



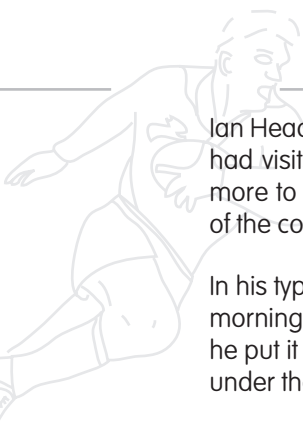
John Sattler about to get a pass away for NSW against Queensland. The late John O'Neill is in the background.

I will never forget Satts hit one thief who went down, got up on his feet, staggered a couple of paces and went down again. One of our players was running along the road and he saw this dark face peering out from a doorway so he gave him a short right. The only problem was this fellow was the trumpeter for the band and the damage he received stopped him working for a time.

We journalists on the tour had a meeting and we decided to put a lid on what happened but when we arrived back in Sydney the next day it was all over the papers and there were more please explains from the management.

The answer was simple ... in those days players had the right to their privacy and what happened on tour stayed there and it's a pity that does not apply these days. We can only hope that the present day players have the same spirit of comradeship that is evident with those from previous eras.

The players who have rallied around John Peard after he suffered a stroke some months ago provides a classic example of modern-day comradeship. There is a never-ending string of former and present day players and officials who call in to see him, to encourage him, and in turn, be impressed by the courage and determination of this remarkable man.



Ian Heads and I went to see him a couple of weeks ago and that day he had visits from Terry Fearnley, Max Brown, Billy Smith, John Raper with more to come and in the previous weeks the list was like a Who's Who of the code.

In his typical sense of humour, John suggested that Billy popped in most mornings on his way to work and shook hands with him because, as he put it 'his hands are freezing and mine are warm because they were under the blankets'.

Ironically that day I came across a quotation from Muhammad Ali which seemed to fit in perfectly with 'Bomber' Peard — 'champions are not made in gyms, champions are made from something they have deep inside ... a desire ... a dream ... a vision'. And I might say that John 'Bomber' Peard is a real champion.

Recently I had the pleasure of attending the inaugural get together of a new body, the Men of League, which has John Fahey as the patron, Max Brown the secretary, Ron Coote the president, Jim Hall the vice-president and Brian James the treasurer.

There were nearly 150 at the first get together and it was something very special to see the genuine enthusiasm for the Men of League program which is aiming to support former players, referees and officials and their families who have found themselves in difficulties.

Now for true confession time ... in any journalist's career there are always some questions or a statement we would like to erase from our memory. Probably the best and most forceful question I ever asked happened at Redfern Oval many years ago.

Souths were playing and my good friend, the late Bernie Purcell suffered a badly dislocated collarbone and had to be helped off the field. I went to the dressing room after the match and Bernie was still there, waiting for an ambulance to take him to hospital.

He was white with the intense pain from the damage and in one of the most brilliant questions of all time I said to Bernie 'How are you?' Bernie just looked at me and replied: 'I'm great Clarko and thanks for asking'.

Then there was the profound statement I made that there is no way State of Origin football would be a success because I reasoned club team mates would not go in hard against each other.

Well, Mr Arthur Beetson thankfully scuttled that theory with one whack to his Parrmatta team mate, Mick Cronin, and that virtually ensured that the old Clarko was wrong and State of Origin football would become an enormous success.

One of the most pleasing tasks I have had was to help Mal Meninga and Johnny Raper with their autobiographies. They were both a pleasure to work with and co-operated to meet those demanding deadlines.

I asked Chook's wife, Caryl, to write a chapter in his book and she came up with a gem of a story about their trip to England in 1994. Chook was desperately keen to show Caryl the Troutbeck Hotel where the team stayed on the 1962 tour.

They drove through Ilkley then up into the moors and finally came to this building and Chook was so excited. 'This is it, that was Arthur Summons room, that was mine' he told Caryl. Then it was snapshot time and Chook shed a few tears as memories flooded back.

The building was a home for aged men and Chook spoke to the staff and told them he had stayed there with the Kangaroo team. Then there were more snapshots, a few more tears and back into the car to head off.

About 200 yards down the road, Caryl said they saw a sign ... Troutbeck Hotel they had been at the wrong place. So it was more snapshots but no more tears.

That old phrase, like chalk and cheese, certainly applies to rugby league the way it was and the way it is these days ... today there are so many full-time professionals, the pressure on the coaches and referees is intense



Benny Elias fires out his pass during the match against Leeds on the 1990s Kangaroo tour.

... there is a very real worry about the state of the game in the country districts and the judiciary system leaves we outsiders wondering just what the heck it's all about.

I can understand clubs are basically in favour of this present judiciary system which could mean one of their players receives a smaller sentence than he should have received.



Looking a bit more relaxed as a player than he is in these days, Ricky Stuart organises a Raiders attack.

Certainly the old system was not perfect but at least you did not see a player getting a discount on a sentence because he pleaded guilty so what should have been a three match suspension was down to one match.

Surely if a player is found to be guilty of committing an offence the rules should be enforced and the correct sentence handed down which would help ensure that the players are protected and the thugs receive the sentence they deserve. Part of the problem could be that referees do not send players off the field these days but rely on putting them on report.

One of the big changes in the game these days to when I was involved is that so many players these days are full-time professionals and there should be concern about their future after their football careers are over. Do these young men have any sort of employment they can fall back on when the time comes to retire from the game? Certainly the top money earners would probably be OK but the huge army of players in the middle order are the worry.

I recently read a book written by the brilliant author, James A. Michener when he touched on the subject of life after football. After meeting with a number of top American football players, Michener wrote:

One afternoon after I left a meeting with these eight men, it suddenly occurred to me that these superlative men had

been forced to retire from their athletic careers at an age when I, in my profession, had yet to write word one. Their public lives had ended before mine began. In their mid-thirties these gifted men had reached the climax of their fame, they had scintillated for a decade then been required to find other occupations. I had only stumbled into a career at which I could work till eighty ... if I lived that long.

In another extract from his book, Michener wrote:

In the years ahead we will read dozens of accounts of young studs who tore the town apart in High School, went to college with bundles of illegal money, graduated into the professionals with oodles of money and then, at the age of 32, watched in dismay as their world crumbled and they lost their money.

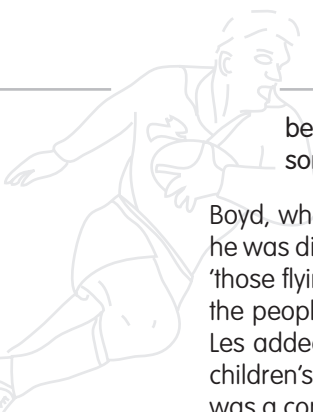
Let us hope that a combination of the players managers and the clubs can work to ensure that the players really do have a life after football but being from the old school, I believe that the best avenue for the future is that players are in employment now, even during their football careers.

There is another serious worry for the game with the deterioration of the code in the country districts, which, for many years, has been a lifeblood for the code. The warning signs have been there ever since Super League became a force but for some reason they have been ignored.

I spoke to a number of people who are in a hands-on situation in the country, former internationals Les Boyd and Noel Cleal and Peter McAlister, the promotions manager for Wagga Rugby League. These men are genuine in their passion about country football and believe the country rugby league needs to be restructured with the administration separated from the field operations.

As Noel Cleal put it:

The field officers must concentrate on their critical job and be completely separate from the administrators. People have been dictated to and there are a lot of voluntary workers who have become fed up with the direction, or the lack of it, out there in the Country. People have become disenchanted with what is going on. Basically there are a lot of very unhappy people right now and this is one of the reasons why there is a large turnover of people on club committees. The bottom line is the CRL should be restructured, the administrators stay



behind their desks, chase up the marketing arm and sponsorships and let the field officers get out and do their job.

Boyd, who never pussy-footed around when he played the game, said he was disillusioned with what had been happening and suggested that 'those flying the desks have to get off their backsides get out and talk to the people in the country districts and listen to what the problems are'. Les added that one thing that had to be done was the development of children's football because, as he put it, that's where it all starts. He said it was a concern that so many senior players were not interested in representing their district and the time when it was an honour to play Country Firsts seems to have been pushed aside.

Peter McAlister was just as straightforward and he put it just as forcefully as Boyd and Cleal when he said there had to be a new broom. He added that:

It boils down to the fact that Rugby League is now big business, not a sport and that is more evident since Super League took the reins and people are sick and tired of it.

In the 1988 and 1989 seasons, nine quality players came into the Riverina district as captain-coaches and the game flourished. But these days it would be impossible to get players of that calibre because they all talk in telephone numbers. The simple fact is that the money being handed out to players these days is obscene and it has forced some clubs to the wall.

We all know how vital country football has been to the health and welfare of the code, especially here in Sydney. You simply have to look at the list of internationals to see where many of them started their playing careers to realise that something has to be done, and done very quickly.

There is another area of the game that has changed dramatically in recent years, and that is the contest for the ball. It seems that rugby league is the only football code that has erased so many areas of unpredictability of possession, the stereotype play the ball and the greatest farce of all the scrum.

Back in 1971, when players were allowed to strike for the ball in the play-the-ball, Souths President, George Piggins hooked the ball back a couple of times in a play-the-ball which gave his team vital possession and ended with a grand final win over St George.

And what about the scrums these days, they are no longer a contest but just a little get together of opposition players and again the predictability of whoever puts the ball in gets possession, but you never know, one of these days there may be a minor miracle and a scrum will be won against the feed, but we won't hold out breath waiting for that unlikely event.

I doubt if there has ever been greater pressure on coaches than there is in today's game and the question mark over the future of some started some time ago and has gained momentum in the last few weeks which again emphasises the massive changes in the game in recent years.

Perhaps if the coaches looked back and recalled how the game was played with that, and I have to use the word again, unpredictability, it would give them greater scope to utilise their players attacking and defensive skills and the big winners would be the most important people in the game, the public.

But it seems some of coaches are quite happy for the present system to operate because they can make plans for four or five rucks aheads when the expected will happen, there will be a bomb and for the first time in the match, there will be a contest for the ball.

While I mentioned concern about the future of players in their life after football, the way things are the same worry is certainly there for some of the coaches. It reminds me of the great quote from the legendary English soccer coach, Tommy Docherty when he said 'They sacked me as nicely as they could. It was one of the nicest sackings I've had.'

Finally I believe an opinion by the legend, Sir Donald Bradman sums up what the approach to sport and life should be. Sir Donald stated:

When considering the stature of an athlete, or for that matter any person, I set great store on certain qualities which I believe to be essential in addition to skill. They are the person conducts his or her life with dignity, with integrity, courage and perhaps most of all, with modesty. These virtues are totally compatible with pride, ambition and competitiveness.

And finally my very sincere thanks and appreciation for the great honour it has been to be in this role this evening. I must say that there is never a chance I will be a Lotto winner because I used all my luck in my role for nearly 40 years with the *Herald* and the *Sun-Herald*. Thank you for your patience and your courtesy.



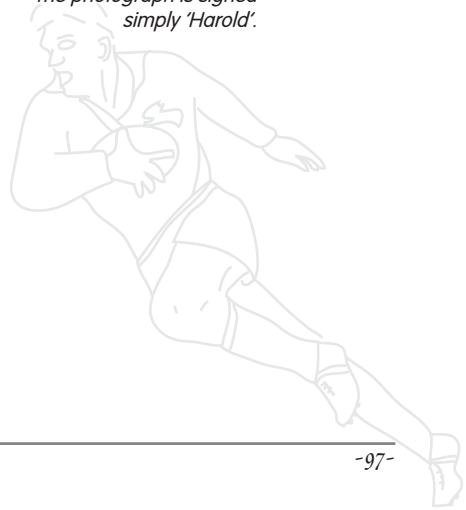
'Ahr Waggy' Harold Wagstaff and the Making of Anglo-Australian Rugby League Culture

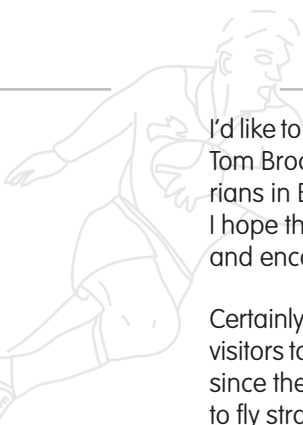
4 July 2003, North Sydney

Tony Collins



*Harold Wagstaff in his England
cap and shirt in 1911.
The photograph is signed
simply 'Harold'.*





I'd like to start by saying what an honour it is to be invited to give this year's Tom Brock Annual lecture. Among the small band of rugby league historians in Britain Tom was a well-known and highly respected figure — so I hope that in some small way this lecture provides my tribute to the help and encouragement he provided to British historians over the years.

Certainly I hope I'm more successful than other recent British rugby league visitors to Sydney — I note with trepidation that it's almost a year to the day since the pride of Great Britain flew into Sydney to take on Australia, only to fly straight back out again on the back of a 64-10 defeat.

In such circumstances it seems downright perverse to ask a Pom to come and talk to an Australian audience about rugby league. In fact the only thing I can think of which would be even more perverse would be to ask a Pom to come over to talk about cricket.

It's usual at events like this for the speaker to start with a few comments about his or her journey. Well, in the mental geography of the British rugby league supporter, the journey to Sydney is not very far at all; it's just a little bit further east than Hull.

Most kids growing up in a rugby league environment in Britain will know the suburbs of Sydney better than those of London. Growing up in Hull in the late 1960s, I could point out Penrith and North Sydney on a map of Sydney but I'd be hard-pressed to show you where Surbiton or Twickenham were on a map of London.

I remember when I was maybe nine or ten, every Friday afternoon at school the teacher would give a pop quiz; she'd pick a letter and ask for the name of an animal, vegetable, country, town etc that began with that letter. One day she picked 'P'; when she asked for a town I said Parramatta. 'I've never heard of that, where is it?' she asked. 'In Australia' I replied. 'Are you sure you're not making it up?' she said. At that point Steven Lickiss, a fellow Hull KR supporter stuck his hand up and said 'Please Miss, I've heard of Parramatta'. I'd like to be able to report that, just like in the movie 'Spartacus', all the kids rose one by one to declare that they too had heard of Parramatta. Sadly, they didn't, but the fact that at least three of us in the class had heard of it demonstrated what journalist Adrian MacGregor has described as the 'intangible bond' between rugby league in the two countries.

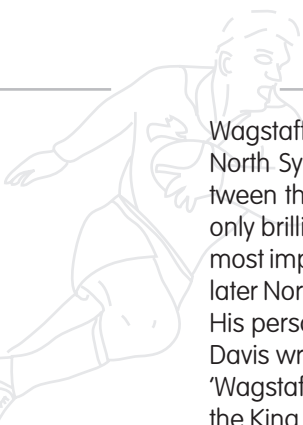
Which is what I want to talk about tonight. I want to look at how Anglo-Australian rugby league culture was formed, the parallels between the sport in the two countries and why the link has proved so durable. And I want to do that by looking at the career of possibly the greatest English league player of all, Harold Wagstaff.

I've also brought along some photographs — in the 1930s the managers of British tours to Australia would often go around clubs giving talks about the tour using a 'magic lantern' slide show — so despite what Bill Gates may say, Powerpoint is nothing new, it's just the magic lantern with bells on.



1914-15
Huddersfield,
*The Team of all
the Talents: the
all-conquering
1914-15
Huddersfield
team, one of
rugby league's
greatest ever
club sides.*

Why Wagstaff? Wagstaff is crucial to cementing the link between Britain and Australia. He captained the 1914 and 1920 British touring teams to Australia and New Zealand, tours which established the template for future tours and he led Huddersfield's 'Empire Team of All The Talents', a side which heavily featured Australian stars as it swept all before it in the years immediately before World War I, in the process helping to establish the tradition of Australian players in the English league. Just as importantly, he played a central role in the three key developments in rugby league that helped to forge a shared culture and identity for the sport in the two countries in the second decade of the twentieth century; namely, the development of a trade unionist, oppositional outlook among players, an innate sense of superiority over rugby union, and the contradictory combination of a working-class democratic spirit and loyalty to the Empire. On top of the shared social circumstances of the rugby splits of 1895 and 1907-8, these developments helped to solidify Anglo-Australian rugby league culture.



Wagstaff's greatness was recognised by English and Australians alike. North Sydney's Sid Deane argued that Wagstaff was the difference between the two sides in the 1914 Ashes series: 'Harold Wagstaff was not only brilliant in attack and wonderful in defence but his leadership was a most important factor in the team's success'. Dinny Campbell of Easts and later Norths described him as 'the greatest tactician I ever played against. His personality was dynamic.' *The Referee's* football correspondent, J. C. Davis wrote about the 1914 third test, the so-called 'Rorke's Drift' test, that 'Wagstaff, always a great player, that day became *the ubiquitous*, and the King of the game ... Here, there and everywhere, all the time he was doing the work of half-a-dozen men. Wagstaff the Great.' In 1946, seven years after his early death, the Sydney *Rugby League News* gave pride of place to Wagstaff's memoir of the 1914 series as part of its build-up to that year's test series.

As can be seen from these quotes, there is something totemic about Wagstaff, in his achievements, his reputation, almost in his very being. Even his name is quintessentially northern English. He was always Harold, not Harry with its connotations of princes of the English realm. The name almost seems to have been designed to emphasise the flat vowel sounds of Yorkshire and Lancashire. And of course the aitch was rarely sounded — he was 'Arold, not Harold — a signifier of working-class speech in both the north and south of England. His nickname too, 'Ahr Waggy', underlines the close and familial relationship he had with the game's supporters; in the north to prefix someone's name with 'Our' denotes a close family member, conveying, in the words of Richard Hoggart, a 'sense of connection, of being part of a larger possessive whole, of not being only discrete individuals'. In this, he parallels Gracie Fields, the singing star of the 1930s who hailed from Rochdale, and was known universally as 'Our Gracie'. (Incidentally, I'm informed by John O'Hara that in Australia this honour was extended only to 'Our Don' Bradman and the singer 'Our Gladys' Moncrieff.)

'I am a Northern Union man all the way through', Wagstaff declared in the first sentence of a series of autobiographical articles published in 1934, 'and I was suckled in the Northern Union game'. He never played any other form of football seriously and did not even see a game of rugby union until he was in Australia on the 1914 British tour. He was born in 1891 in Holmfirth, a village now familiar to anyone who has ever seen the long-running BBC TV series 'Last of the Summer Wine'. He made his debut for the local amateur side, Underbank Rangers, aged fourteen and the following season scored their first try under the new thirteen-a-side rules in September 1906. Two months later he signed as a professional for Hud-

Wagstaff's 1914 British Lions at their end of tour farewell dinner in Sydney.

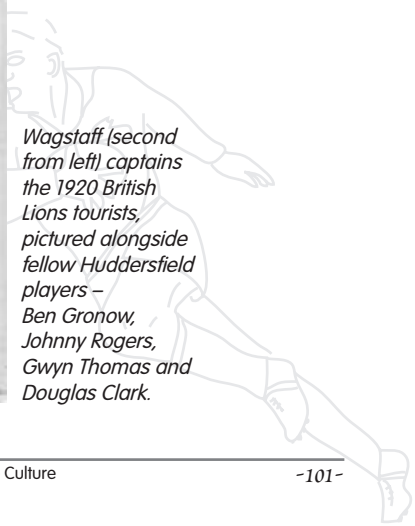


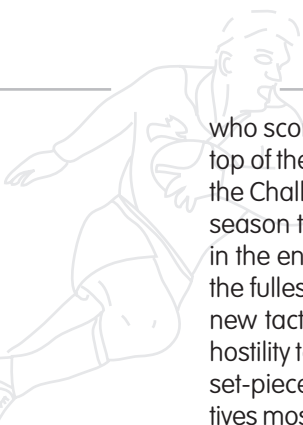
dersfield, aged fifteen years and 175 days, the youngest ever. Two years later he made his debut in representative football for Yorkshire, selected to some extent because of his policy of not kicking the ball, a practice he continued to preach throughout his career, which eventually led to Huddersfield becoming known as the team which wouldn't kick, paralleling the great South Sydney sides down the years. A few weeks later he made his England debut against the 1908 Kangaroos. Eighteen months later, aged just nineteen he was appointed captain of Huddersfield, a post he was to hold for the next fifteen years. Aged 22, he was made captain of the national side.

The blossoming of his career matched that of the Huddersfield side. Crucial to that success were its Australian stars such as Glebe's Tommy Gleeson, Newcastle's Paddy Walsh and, most of all, Easts great Albert Rosenfeld,



Wagstaff (second from left) captains the 1920 British Lions tourists, pictured alongside fellow Huddersfield players – Ben Gronow, Johnny Rogers, Gwyn Thomas and Douglas Clark.





who scored over 200 tries in just three seasons. Wagstaff's team finished top of the Championship table every season between 1911 and 1915, won the Challenge Cup twice and the Yorkshire Cup three times. In the 1914-15 season they won every trophy available to them, losing only two games in the entire season. They played the game in fast, open style that made the fullest use of the opportunities provided by the NU's rules, developing new tactics — such as 'scientific obstruction', the 'standing pass' and a hostility to kicking the ball — which moved the game far beyond the static set-pieces of its origins. It was no accident that the metaphors and adjectives most commonly used to describe the team were those of science and industry, as exemplified by a 1924 description of the side:

There was an absolute understanding between all parts of a perfectly working machine which resulted in the most audacious and unexpected movements being carried out with a precision that left the opposing defence aghast. Fast and clever three-quarters were served by halves whose brains were ever working at high pressure behind forwards who, as occasion demanded, could play the traditional scrummaging game or convert themselves into temporary three-quarters and handle the ball.

For a town which had been built on the efficiency of its textile mills and spectators whose day-to-day lives were based on synchronised, collective working in those mills, Wagstaff's team was the embodiment of working-class industrial collectivity at play.

However, despite this iconic status and the high regard in which he was universally held, it is important to note that Wagstaff did not have an unproblematic relationship with the rugby league authorities, even after his retirement as a player. Indeed, the same can be said of many of Wagstaff's peers in the rugby league pantheon — of the nine players inducted into British rugby league's Hall of Fame in 1988, only the two Australians did not at some point clash with either their clubs or the RFL itself. This antagonism between players and officials came to a head shortly after the outbreak of World War I.

There has been a good deal of work produced in Australia on the war and the two rugby codes, such as that of Chris Cuneen and Murray Phillips. What is less widely known is that a similar, but not exact, division took place in England; union ceased operations in September 1914 while league carried on, although only unofficial competitions took place after 1915. More

importantly, in November 1914, three months after the declaration of war, English rugby league was hit by a series of players' strikes opposing wage cuts which had been proposed by the clubs. Referees too threatened to go on strike. The players were led by a four man committee, comprising Wagstaff, Gwyn Thomas, a Welsh full-back from Wigan who later joined Huddersfield, Charlie Seeling, the veteran Wigan forward who had toured with the 1905 All Blacks, and Leeds's Australian centre three-quarter, Dinny Campbell. The fact that the four leaders came from England, Australia, New Zealand and Wales — emphasising the international character of the sport in England — was also, consciously or not, highly symbolic.

Faced with a threat of all-out strike action, the rugby league authorities caved in and the compulsory wage cuts were rescinded. It is important to understand the context of these strikes — in the early months of the war there had been a huge hue and cry against professional football by large sections of the national press, much of it led by rugby union supporters, who believed that those who played or watched professional football were failing in their patriotic duty to volunteer for the army. To go on strike for their rights as professional footballers was significantly out of step with the militarist hysteria which seemingly prevailed in Britain. Although there is no evidence of players explicitly opposing the war, their failure to completely fall in line illustrates the fact that pro-war hysteria was by no means the norm among sections of the British working-class. It is interesting to note that the majority of league players only joined the armed forces after conscription was introduced through the back door in early 1916. And indeed a recent study of the town of Huddersfield during the war has discovered deep levels of indifference and hostility to the war effort.

The so-called 'national unity' of World War I did not extinguish oppositional attitudes among players. In November 1920 Wagstaff and Gwyn Thomas were the two central figures in the formation of the Players' Union, the initiative for which had been generated on the 1920 British tour to Australia. For much of the next eighteen months the RFL spent considerable time attempting to head-off the union's demands for higher wages, better benefits for players and a more equitable transfer system. The union's formation reflected the tremendous surge in class conflict which took place in Britain in the years following the end of the war. During this time Salford, Oldham, Barrow, Hull and Halifax all had to deal with threatened or actual strikes by players, and the union itself threatened two national players' strikes, although on both occasions it found itself outmanoeuvred by the RFL. But by the end of 1922 the inexperience of the union's leadership, coupled with Wagstaff's health problems with a stomach ulcer and Thomas's somewhat



abrupt flight to America, not to mention the divide and rule tactics of the clubs, led to the end of the Players' Union. However, it wasn't the last time that Wagstaff was to clash with the RFL — in 1929 he was initially refused permission to sit on the Huddersfield club committee because he was a former professional player.

Although British rugby league never had the same close links with the organised labour movement that the Australian game had, the attitude towards the war and the deep divisions after it demonstrate a similarity of oppositional outlook that was shared among wide sections of both the Australian and British working classes. What's more, the cultural antagonism towards the southern English middle-class archetype was also shared, in spades, by the northern English working classes.

This was most obviously demonstrated by the attitude shown towards the rugby union game by rugby league in both countries. Following the recruitment of most of the leading rugby league players into the armed forces in 1916, services union sides began grabbing them like kids in a candy store. The first significant match took place in April 1916 at Leeds when Wagstaff and three other league tourists were picked for a 'North of England Military XV' against an ANZACs XV, featuring Australians Tommy Gleeson, Newtown's Viv Farnsworth and Norths' Jimmy Devereux and Sid Deane. Despite never having played the game and seeing only one union match in his life, Wagstaff was the star of the match.



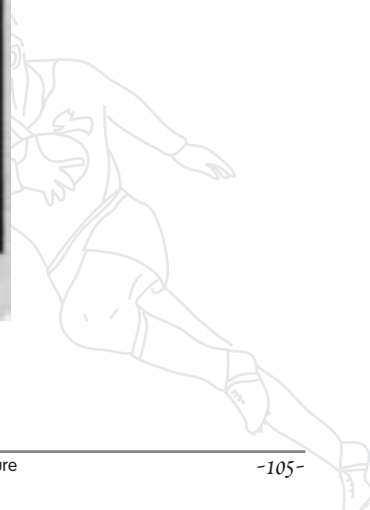
Wagstaff's first game of rugby union: the 1916 North of England Military versus an Australasian representative military team at Headingley. Both sides fielded four league internationals.

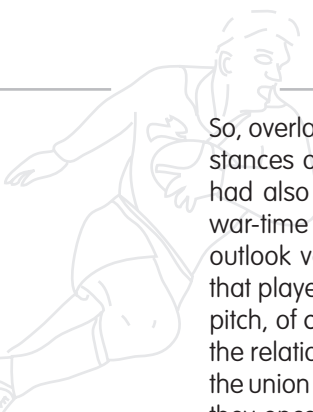
Later that year, Wagstaff, Albert Rosenfeld and half a dozen other league stars mysteriously found themselves all assigned to the same Army Motor Transport depot at Grove Park in South London, whose commanding officer just happened to be a member of the RFU executive committee. During the 1916-17 season the Grove Park union team tore apart almost every other team in the south of England, including Australian and New Zealand services sides, winning 25 out of 26 games and scoring 1,110 points while conceding just 41, setting a new British union record for points in a season. Their only defeat was a last minute 6-3 loss to a United Services side which included eight rugby union internationals plus Wigan's Billy Seddon and Leeds' Willie Davies. There was no secret to their success; as Wagstaff described it, the Grove Park team simply played 'rugby league football under rugby union rules'.

The record of the Grove Park team in the war, and to a lesser extent that of the similar Royal Navy Devonport side, firmly ended any lingering sense of inferiority rugby league supporters may have had in relation to union. In the eyes of rugby league and the communities in which it was based, rugby union, as in Australia, was quite clearly the junior code, less skilful, less athletic and much less satisfying for players and spectators alike. This sense of superiority was underlined in the north of England by use of the everyday phrase 'best in the Northern Union', the implication being that if it was the best in the Northern Union, it was also better than anything else.



The Grove Park Army Service Corps rugby union side, the outstanding military rugby union side of World War I. Wagstaff is second from the right on the front row.





So, overlaid on top of the objective similarities in class and social circumstances of rugby league players in Britain and Australia, British players had also gone through experiences as club employees, as players in war-time and in rugby union which had given rise to attitudes and an outlook very similar to that Australian players. Wagstaff himself noted that players of the two countries were noticeably more friendly — off the pitch, of course — following World War I. It is also interesting to contrast the relations between Australian and British league players with those in the union game. The 1908 Wallabies were shocked at the level of snobbery they encountered and until the 1980s the British rugby union press had little positive to say about Australian players and tactics. Even as late as 1998, one of the reasons given for the sacking of Bob Dwyer as Leicester rugby union coach was the fact that he was ‘too Australian’.

This could not be more different to league. Many Australian players who played for English rugby league clubs remained there after they had stopped playing. Albert Rosenfeld who came over with the first Australian tourists in 1908, lived in Huddersfield until he died in 1970, working for most of his life as a dustman. The peerless winger Brian Bevan has a statue erected to his memory in Warrington. Arthur Clues, who made his reputation through ferocious assaults on the 1946 British tourists, settled in Leeds, becoming probably the most prominent of its sporting celebrities. When he died in 1998, the church had to close its doors because so many people wanted to go his funeral. A similar point can be made about many of the British players who came to play in Australia in the 1960s and 1970s and stayed on, such as Dick Huddart, Dave Bolton and Tommy Bishop.

This shared common identity could be seen as surprising given the ferocity and violence which were an integral part of Ashes test matches. The tone was set by



Sydney's Rugby League News greets the 1946 British tourists, heralding the league as 'the most democratic of sports' and later reprinting Wagstaff's memoir of the 1914 'Rorke's Drift Test'.

the 1914 'Rorke's Drift' third test match — in which the two sets of players slugged it out to such an extent that at one point the British were down to nine players, yet still managed to pull off an amazing 14-6 victory, despite a second half which lasted 54 minutes due to stoppages for injuries. Six years later, the first test match between the two countries following World War I set the tone for what was to come: 'the contest was not characterised by anything striking in sportsmanship: that is, the striking things done were with fists or boots,' wrote one reporter. This intensified even more in the 1930s. The 1932 tour became notorious for the second test match, the 'Battle of Brisbane', which Australia won despite being reduced to ten men at one point because of the injuries, and both the first test and the match against the Queensland representative side were also characterised by fierce violence. Journalist Claude Corbett described the Brisbane match as 'hard all the time, rough most of the time and foul frequently'.

Nor did the experience of World War II do much to halt the violence; less than half an hour into the first test match following the war, Bradford school teacher Jack Kitching was sent off for punching Australian captain Joe Jorgensen. Clive Churchill's abiding memory of the 1948 Kangaroo tour to Britain was the violence of the English club sides. Bradford's Ken Traill described the third test of 1952, known as the 'Battle of Bradford' as the roughest game he had ever experienced. Most notoriously the 1954 Britain versus New South Wales tour match was abandoned by the referee just sixteen minutes into the second half due to fighting. And the 1960s saw more players sent off in test matches than in any other decade, culminating in the 1970 World Cup final at Leeds, when vicious fighting between the players did not end when the referee blew the final whistle.

Yet such behaviour was never once used as a reason to question, let alone break, the relationship between the Australian and British rugby league authorities. This stands in marked contrast to the Bodyline cricket tour of 1932-33 when Jardine's bowling tactics appeared to threaten the future of Anglo-Australian cricket. Far worse misdemeanours were committed by British league players a few months before Jardine's men arrived in Australia without a hint of an international incident. Partly this can be explained by the importance of cricket to the Empire and the upper classes of society. Yet, the 1932 test series created massive interest in Australia, being watched by almost 150,000 people, and press coverage, especially for the 'Battle of Brisbane' test, often moved from the back to the front pages of the newspapers. The opportunity certainly existed for at least the more sensationalist sections of the press to question the relationship between the two countries' rugby league authorities.



Britain's Alf Ellaby and Les Adams contest Hector Gee for the football in the heroic Australian victory at the notorious 1932 'Battle of Brisbane'.

But this did not happen, due to two interconnected and contradictory reasons. Firstly, as we have seen, because of the deep cultural affinities between the predominantly working-class constituency of the sport in the two countries. Secondly, and perhaps more controversially, the fact that Australian rugby league officials were as fundamentally loyal to the Empire as were their British counterparts.

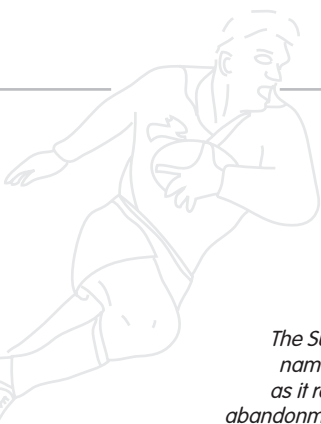
In passing, I would argue that these were the reasons which also scuppered the 1914 and 1933 talks between the NSWRL and the VFL which discussed the possibility of forming a united nationwide Australian football code. The discussions came to nothing, partly because of differences over the rules but also, I would suggest, because a united game couldn't offer this combination of working-class self-assertion and the imperial link.

The leaders of Australian league were extremely vigorous in their belief in Britishness. At a dinner in honour of the 1928 British tourists in Sydney, Harry Sunderland told the tourists to 'remember Captain Cook; if he hadn't planted the Union Jack here, Australia might have become a Dutch dependency'. 'We are just as British as you are,' protested Harry 'Jersey' Flegg, the president of the New South Wales Rugby League, in 1950 during a dispute with British tour manager George Oldroyd. 'Australians look to England as the mother country in war, in industry and also in rugby league football,' said Kangaroo tour manager E. S. Brown in an address to the

RFL Council in 1954, explaining that ‘there is a strong desire to in Australia to get along with England from every point of view’. When H. V. Evatt met the leaders of British rugby league in 1945, he argued that a tour to Australasia by the British was vital for ‘the best interests of rugby league football and of the Empire’.

Just as importantly, it was the Australian press, far more than the British, which utilised imperial imagery for league test matches. It was they who dubbed the 1914 third test in Sydney as ‘the Rorke’s Drift Test’, in comparison with the 1879 battle of Rorke’s Drift during the Anglo-Zulu war, when 100 British troops held off 3,000 Zulu warriors. In parentheses, it must be noted that a book published this year, *Zulu Victory* by Ron Lock and Peter Quantrill reveals that the British forces who relieved the troops at Rorke’s Drift also massacred over 800 wounded Zulu prisoners in the aftermath. The battle of Rorke’s Drift appears to have had special significance for Sydney; in 1882 the Art Gallery of New South Wales purchased Alphonse de Neuville’s painting ‘The Defence of Rorke’s Drift’, which you can still see prominently displayed in the gallery today. The use of such rhetoric continued even as late as 1958 when *Truth* began its report of the second test, again a landmark British victory against overwhelming odds, by quoting Shakespeare: ‘This happy breed of men, this little world ... this England’. Examples such as this, I would argue, also raise questions about the strength of Australian nationalism as expressed through sport before the 1960s.

But this loyalty to the Empire was also tempered with a hostility to many of the social mores of British society, especially its deference and class snobbery. Whereas Jardine, and English cricket captains in general until the late 1960s, were the embodiment of the English Imperial elite, rugby league players manifestly were not. British rugby league tourists were not seen as representatives of a distant, and perhaps alien, government. In fact, they had far more in common with Australia’s self-image as a country of the (white) working man than with the privilege and class discrimination that English cricket represented. Much of the hostility towards Australia from the British upper- and middle-classes was based on a social snobbery which was also directed with equal venom at the working-class in Britain — Australia was seen as ‘an entire continent peopled by the Lower Orders’ in the words of English upper-class novelist Angela Thirkell. Jardine’s tactics were unacceptable to Australians to a great extent because of what he represented. Yet physical intimidation and worse by a British rugby league side that shared the same social background and suffered similar frustrations as the great mass of Australians was a ‘fair dinkum’ part of the game.



The Sun-Herald names names as it reports the abandonment of the 1954 NSW versus Great Britain match. The alleged hit-man, Britain's Duggie Greenall, pictured here pursuing Harry Wells, bred rabbits in his spare time.



Rugby league perfectly encapsulated the two seemingly contradictory attitudes of imperial loyalty but hostility to privilege. And Anglo-Australian test matches provided the arena in which both aspects of this relationship could be demonstrated. For many Australians and working-class Britons, the British rugby league tourists presented an image of the Empire in their own self-proclaimed likeness: working-class, democratic and meritocratic. Made up workers from the industrial heartlands of Britain the British players were men just as they were. This sense of shared identity was sometimes reflected by the combatants on the field: when Nat Silcock and Ray Stehr were sent off for fighting in the first test match of 1936, they shook hands once they had left the field. During the 1958 Brisbane test Australian captain Brian Davies forbade his players from attacking British captain Alan Prescott's broken right arm (although this decision was heavily criticised by Clive Churchill among others). Most tellingly, following the 1954 abandoned match Britain versus New South Wales match, the players met that night at a dance and, according to Clive Churchill, 'had a good laugh' about the match — although Aub Oxford, who sadly died a few weeks ago, the referee who had abandoned the match, never refereed at that level again.

This leads to my final and perhaps the most important point about the significance of Harold Wagstaff to Anglo-Australian rugby league culture. Touring British rugby league sides were exclusively working-class — almost uniquely in comparison to any other sports' touring sides such as cricket or rugby union — and were captained and led by men who by and large worked with their hands when not playing football.

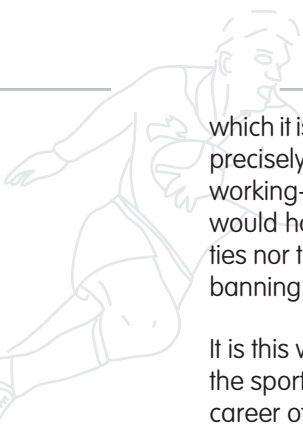
In an age when working people did not travel around the world — unless they were soldiers, sailors or emigrants, and then it was always under the command of their so-called social superiors — it was almost unheard of for a working-class person to hold such a leadership position (outside of the labour movement). At best, a working-class man — and the situation for working-class women was far worse — could hope to be a trusted servant or the stereotypically loyal ‘Tommy Atkins’ character.

For working-class Australians, just as much as British, to see an working-class man such as Wagstaff as a leader of a British national side was an almost unprecedented event, which, along with his football skills, perhaps explains the tremendous coverage Wagstaff was given in the Australian press.

Wagstaff stood out as a symbol of what working people could achieve given the opportunity to get a ‘fair go’. And it was rugby league which gave him, and many others from similar backgrounds, that opportunity. In the British army he would have been a NCO at best, but in rugby league he was a five star general. In short, he became ‘Ahr Waggy’ not just for English rugby league followers but for Australians too.

Wagstaff’s memoirs of the 1914 Rorke’s Drift test match were reprinted as much in Australia as they were in Britain — in 1946 the *Sydney Rugby League News* gave them centre stage in its preview of the first Ashes test following World War II, and as late as 1992 they were prominently featured in Geoff Armstrong’s *The Greatest Game* compendium. One of the interesting points about the 1946 coverage is that discourse on the tour was wrapped up with the idea that rugby league was the most democratic of sports, as can be seen in the example from *Rugby League News* on page 106. This was also repeated in Britain — the strength of the democratic ideal in league was (and is) very strong, beginning with the rationale for the split in 1895. British journalist Eddie Waring was a regular proponent of this view, and it was this sense that rugby league represented something more than merely sport which accounts for the fury of rugby league supporters around the world against Rupert Murdoch attempt to takeover the game in the 1990s.

I would like to end on a partisan note; after all, this is a lecture to honour a great supporter of rugby league and I have been proud to call myself a rugby league supporter since I was seven years old. The great Jewish novelist Isaac Bashevis Singer once noted that Yiddish had never been the language of a ruling class. A similar point can be made about rugby league: it has never been the sport of a ruling class in any of the countries in



which it is played. Some see that as its weakness — on the contrary, that is precisely from where its strength is drawn. For without its deep roots in the working-classes of the north of England and eastern Australia, the game would have survived neither the persecution of the rugby union authorities nor the corporate attacks of the Murdoch empire (nor, incidentally, its banning by the Nazi collaborators of France’s war-time Vichy government).

It is this working-class, democratic, ‘battler’ spirit — which is central to the sport in both Britain and Australia, and which is embodied in the career of Harold Wagstaff — that, to use a phrase that I believe that would be endorsed by Wagstaff, Tom Brock and countless others across Australia and Britain, has helped to make rugby league the greatest game of all.



Wagstaff followed by Douglas Clark enter the field of play for Huddersfield in the pre-World War I years.

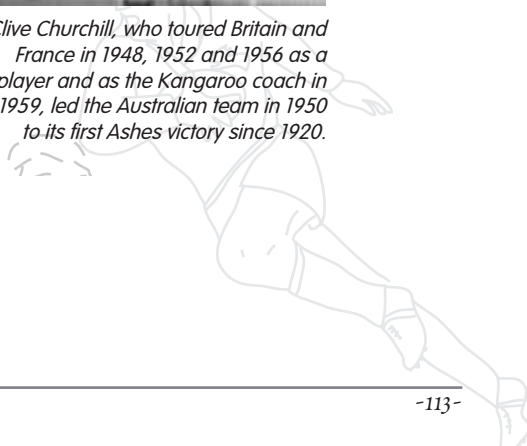
'No More Bloody Bundles for Britain': The post-World War II Tours of the British and French Allies

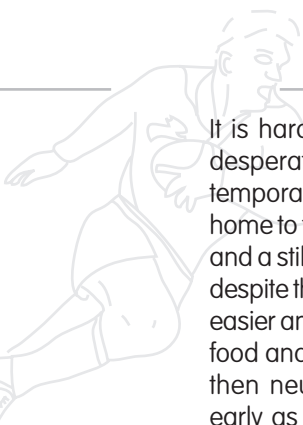
22 September 2004,
NSW Leagues Club, Sydney

Thomas Keneally AO



Clive Churchill, who toured Britain and France in 1948, 1952 and 1956 as a player and as the Kangaroo coach in 1959, led the Australian team in 1950 to its first Ashes victory since 1920.





It is hard for any one who wasn't alive at the time to understand the desperation of World War II, and the hope and exultation which quite temporarily greeted its end. Temporarily, I say, because the soldiers came home to the realities of the post-World War, to rationing, housing shortages, and a still flourishing black market. But even so it was obvious that Aussies, despite the narrow squeak we had had with the Japanese, had enjoyed an easier and healthier time of it all than the British had. The practice of sending food and clothing parcels to the embattled British may have begun in the then neutral United States as early as the northern spring of 1940, but it became the practice of generous Australian families after Goering's dreadful air blitz of England in the summer of 1940. Bundles for Britain became a national endeavour, and in the name of fraternity and kinship, Australian families skimped to put together parcels of knitted clothing and small luxuries for bombed-out, over-worked, hard-up British families. In every suburb, the town hall, the local Red Cross, and many other centres received the knitting and spare food of Australian homes for shipping to a distant Britain.



*An appeal to patriotism in
Rugby League News, 2 August 1941.*

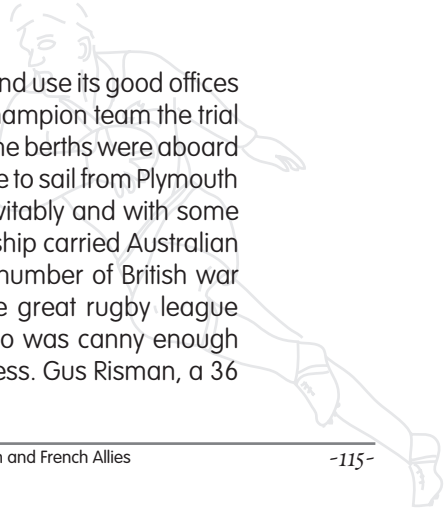
The war over, Britain was still suffering shortages. In late 1945 Australia's External Affairs minister, Dr Herbert Evatt, patron of the NSW Rugby League, went to London for talks with the British Foreign Office and travelled on to Leeds to lobby the Rugby League Council, at whose meeting he suggested a British tour of Australia take place as soon as possible, preferably in the southern winter of 1946. Many of the Council put forward the argument that rugby league was just settling in again, counting its dead, assessing its new generation. But Doc Evatt argued the question of morale, as the Rugby Football League minutes of 10 October 1945 show.¹ Emergency leagues, as they were called, had been kept going between 1939 and 1945, with the British Rugby League Council being notified in 1940 that the Ministry of Labour 'wishes it to be conveyed to the meeting that it desires as much football as possible to be played, so as to provide recreation and relaxation to the workers'. That was not as easy as it sounded, given the number of men in uniform and in reserved occupations such as coal

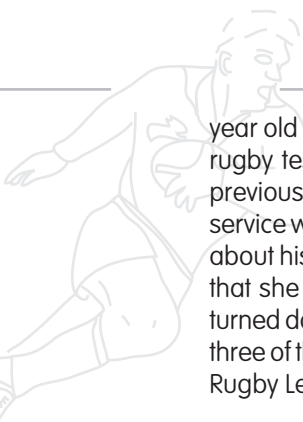
mining. Playing surfaces were scarce. Central Park, Wigan's famous home ground, had been taken over by the Territorial Army, there were anti-aircraft guns on the Kop, the hill at Central Park. Salford's and Swindon's grounds were also turned into storage depots and parade grounds, and a game between Hull and Batley was abandoned after 65 minutes when the air raid sirens sounded on Humberside. Clothes-rationing made the acquisition of guernseys nearly impossible. Improvisation was everything. The smart Eddie Waring, a Dewsbury boy, made use of men from the large nearby military camp to take Dewsbury successfully to the Challenge Cup.

For the sake of the war there were games and armistices between what Geoffrey Moorhouse, the great historian of English league, calls *Homo Twickiens* and the League, when a number of games were played between a team of 15 rugby league servicemen and 15 rugby men. At the Headingley lunch prior to the game which the rugby league men won 15–10, one Captain Stanley Wilson of Northern Command made 'an earnest plea' for the playing of the annual fixture between the union and the league, in the hope of eventually healing the breach. 'In my view', he said 'the line between amateurism and professionalism is the most wavy line that has ever been drawn'.

Perhaps the administration of the present NRL in Australia could take a lesson from the flexibility with which, at Evatt's late 1945 suggestion, the British Rugby League now acted, holding trial matches at Central Park and Headingley to select their touring party of 27 men. They did so in blind hope, lacking the resources to get their men to Australia or New Zealand. The shipping of the world was fully taken up with repatriating troops and prisoners, and taking war brides to their new husbands' homelands, as well as, like my father's late 1945 troop ship, with shipping French and Dutch paratroopers to colonial wars in what was then Indochina and the Dutch East Indies.

The Australian government itself had to intervene and use its good offices to find 32 berths — not cabins — *berths*, for the champion team the trial matches had allowed the British to come up with. The berths were aboard HMS *Indomitable*, the aircraft carrier, which was due to sail from Plymouth to Fremantle on 4 April 1946. The team would inevitably and with some justice thereafter be styled 'the Indomitables'. The ship carried Australian troops, particularly members of the RAAF, and a number of British war brides, as well as its full crew. It also carried the great rugby league commentator and entrepreneur Eddie Waring who was canny enough to get an upper-class berth in the petty-officer's mess. Gus Risman, a 36





year old veteran, who would play rugby league for 26 years and also five rugby tests for Wales, was the captain. He was the only one who had previously toured Australia, but he had also met Australians in his war service with the First Airborne Division in North Africa. Risman was worried about his elderly mother's welfare while he was away, but his application that she should receive 30 shillings a week from the rugby league was turned down. Northern British MPs had to lobby the War Minister to release three of the team from the military to enable them to board with their fellow Rugby League Lions.

Reaching Fremantle, the teams travelled for five days by troop train to reach Central Station in Sydney. In those days test series, whether in cricket, league or union involved much foreplay — the Lions appeared in remote Junee, in Canberra, and again against New South Wales, a game which attracted a crowd of 52,000 to the Sydney Cricket Ground. Newcastle beat them 18–13, and Hunter people began to think a team of theirs might one day belong again in the Sydney competition. By the time of the first test at the Sydney Cricket Ground, the Lions had played six games and attracted a frantic degree of attention.

The selection of the Australian team was an issue over which newly demobilised troops or newly de-manpowered workers and their children spent countless hours of fruitful, or at least enriching, discussion. The story



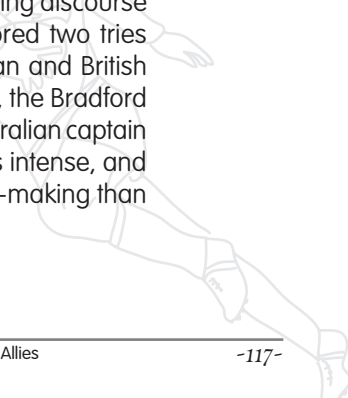
The 1946 Australian test team pose before the first test at the SCG.

may be apocryphal, but it is said that when the English team disembarked from their bus for a training session at the SCG, an Aussie who beheld the size of the British forwards Whitcombe and Gee shouted, 'No more bloody bundles for Britain!' Somebody did say it, somewhere between Junee and Townsville in Queensland, and whoever it was, he was declaring that for rugby league and for the world the war had ended, and all bets were off. The aphorism stands also as a statement that Australia was nearing the end of its duties to the Empire, even though the full political flower of the Bob Menzies era was still to come.

The Australian team was led in the end by Joe Jorgenson of Balmain — its stars included Pat Devery, the Balmain five-eighth, discovered by Latchem Robinson, while playing football in the Domain as a sailor in the Royal Australian Navy during the war; and Lionel Cooper, whom Easts captain Ray Stehr had seen playing Australian Rules football as a soldier in Darwin. A notable member of this internationally inexperienced team was Arthur Clues, Wests' strong second rower who would soon be lost to Leeds, where he would play further football and open a sports store. Another still was Bumper Farrell, the legendary prop from Newtown, who had come close to being expelled from rugby league the year previously for almost biting off the ear of St George prop Bill McRitchie — though Bumper always denied this.

In an era of greater scrutiny, Farrell may have been in trouble for his associations with underworld figures, but in those days all that was grist to the legend, and he was the first of many post World War II Australian tough-guy front row forwards. It was an age of fiercely contested scrums, although post-1945 Bumper Farrell liked to assure the opposition that he had left his dentures in the dressing room.

The first test on 17 June 1946 brought a crowd of 64,526 to the Sydney Cricket Ground for a ferocious encounter. For many people the blowing of referee Tom McMahon's whistle that day was the true return to peace, to the remnants of the pre-war world, and to the intense sporting discourse between Australia and Great Britain. The Australians scored two tries and kicked a goal, and so did Great Britain, and Australian and British honour stood at 8 all at the end of the game. Jack Kitching, the Bradford Northern centre, a schoolmaster, was sent off for striking Australian captain Jorgenson. Expectation for the second test in Brisbane was intense, and the medium of radio, I believe, gave greater room for myth-making than the all-inclusive, all-enquiring eye of television.





Jack Rayner surges forward watched by Bumper Farrell (left) and Dennis Donoghue (Newtown versus Souths at the SCG).

My father's stories of the war in North Africa had been largely to do with the holy task of bringing embarrassment to British allies, of borrowing a compliant officer's uniform, hooning into Cairo in a truck and picking a fight with an officer of one of the household cavalry or infantry regiments in the officers-only bar of Shepherd's Hotel. For him and for hundreds and thousands of other men in eastern Australia, a huge amount of psychological back-pay was wrapped up in the question of this test series.

Such men were in for a disappointment. At the Brisbane Exhibition Ground on Saturday 6 July, the gates were closed when 40,500 were inside the ground. The Australian team itself was shut out with a large part of the crowd. It is estimated that 10,000 people invaded the ground after the gates were shut. A new captain had been appointed, Ron Bailey, Canterbury-Bankstown centre and captain-coach who had spent the first year of the war playing for Huddersfield, and who, the selectors thought, might be better qualified to read the Great Britain game.

The test was a rugged and forward-dominated affair, although the Halifax winger Arthur Bassett scored a hat-trick of tries for a final score of 14–5.

Back in Sydney three weeks later, a somewhat smaller crowd than had turned up for the first test, came to the decider. Britain won 20–7, but the Australians had lost their Balmain fullback Dave Parkinson with a broken leg only seven minutes into the game, and then, in the second half, Arthur Clues was sent off for punching the English halfback, Horne, who was in brilliant form and totally dominated the scrums. Perhaps this tour awakened in the Australian breast such a passion to beat the English that over time we ended up doing it so frequently that no rugby league supporter under 40 years of age can remember the intensity of emotional investment which attended the tour by that great Welshman Gus Risman and his boys. 1946 was simply a triumph for British rugby league, a post-war tour rich in inponderable values as well as in gates and public interest.



Many believed that the omission of Len Smith in 1948 was a 'stinging injustice'.

So, after the Lions tour of 1946, two more seasons of domestic rugby league passed, and Australia was ready to make its reciprocal tour of Great Britain and France. The mystifying omission of Len Smith as a member, let alone captain, of the 1948 Kangaroos is a matter of great speculation, and Ian Heads in *The Kangaroos* tends to blame divisions in rugby league, as in society in general, along Masonic-Catholic lines. Clive Churchill would call Len Smith's omission 'as the greatest blunder ever made by Australian test selectors',² but it overshadowed a number of other wonderful selections, including that of Johnny 'Wacker' Graves, one of the three or four greatest wingers this writer has seen, and Clive Churchill, Jack Rayner, Bobbie Lulham and Dutchy Holland. An abiding image, of many very fine images from that tour is of the captains, Wally O'Connell and Ernest Ward, leading their teams side by side onto Headingley before one of the greatest tests



Jack Rayner instructs the scrum. (From the left Bernie Purcell, Dennis Donoghue, Ernie Hammerton and Norm Nilson).



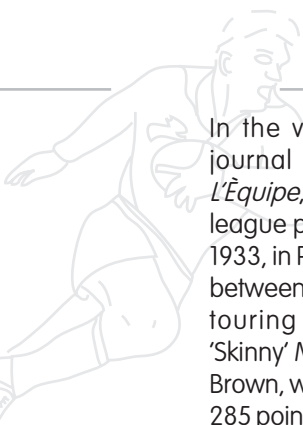
ever played, the first test of 1948. Both captains represent a denial of mythology, for that great centre three-quarter Lance Corporal Ernest Ward towers over Wally O'Connell, Australia's artful dodger. The stands are crammed. Great Britain defeated Australia 23–21 at Headingley, then 16–7 at Swindon, and the third game at Odsal Stadium, Bradford, was called off because of a profound fog which settled unremittingly in Slough where Odsal Stadium stood. The game would not be played until after the Kangaroos returned from France, and Great Britain would win it 23–9.

One cannot overestimate the impact on the Kangaroos of weather, disorientation, homesickness, and Ma Griffen's bad boarding-house food in Ilkley — stewed chicken and Brussels sprouts. 'We had to give her our ration books and she would provide the food', remembered O'Connell. 'I think she used to get half and sell half... We complained a lot, but when we started going to Liverpool and places like that, and saw square miles of bombed areas, we didn't complain so much.' Wally O'Connell visited Ireland and, to the ecstasy of the team,³ brought back 20 kilos of steak supplied by the Australian ambassador in Dublin.

But the tour was an endurance test which only the valiant could survive. In the overcast, drizzling, bitter days around Christmas 1948, the Australians went on to play in a France transmuted and fractured by the war, and in a code which had experienced extraordinary state-sponsored persecution. Australia's captain by now was a Queenslander, the late Bill Tyquin, a St

George man, Wally O'Connell having relinquished the position. The two tests against France were to be played in Marseilles and Bordeaux, and the Kangaroos entered like babes into an area of complex history for both league and union. Helped perhaps by over-indulgence on the bus trip from Toulouse to Perpignan, they were defeated by Catalans 20-5 in the first game. Before the match, Paul Barrière, a hero of the resistance, owner of a hat factory in Carcassone, and president of the French Rugby League, gave the Kangaroos a tour of his manufactory. In the figure of Barrière, Croix de Guerre, Légion d'Honneur, the boys from Brisbane, Newcastle, Balmain, from Easts and Souths and Wests ran into a man who could have told them much of the tormented history of the region, of the relation between French forms of rugby in the Midi and those in Britain. All this in a nation where, for the sake of social cohesion and national mythology, people pretended that most Frenchmen had resisted the humiliation of Vichy France, the puppet French government installed in the south by the Nazis, and of the Nazi occupation itself.

They call the Midi, the south-west of France *l'Ovalie*, the land of the rugby ball, where great players seem to be emanations of a regional ethos, as they are in New Zealand and used to be in South Wales. Rugby had been introduced into the Bordeaux area by Oxbridge expatriates in the wine trade, but was taken up by some of the more elegant French lycées. It was in the 1920s in the Midi that rugby became a vehicle for ancient rivalries between towns and villages, and took on a form which bewildered the elites of British rugby. A lusty *amateurisme marron*, or what became to be called *shamateurism*, was the French reality. Businessmen and mayors of corporations set players up with fake or nominal jobs. For example, in the little town of Quillan in the department of Aude, a local hat maker, Jean Bourrel, attracted players with offers of easy and high-paid employment. In 1929 Quillan, population 3,000, and Lézignan, population 6,000, reached the final, and Quillan won the national title. The style of play was inventive but brutal: in 1927, the Quillan hooker, Gatou Rivièrre was killed playing his old Catalan club, Perpignan. Carcassone versus Toulouse in 1927, Lézignan versus Beziers in 1929, and a savage 1930 France-Wales match in Paris all outraged the international union. The home union and those of the dominions broke off relationships with the Fédération Française de (FFR) Rugby later in the year. 'Owing to the unsatisfactory conditions of the game of Rugby football as managed and played in France, neither our union or the clubs of the union under its jurisdiction will be able to arrange or fulfil fixtures with France or French clubs.' The French were cut off from all international competition in rugby between 1931 and 1945.



In the vacuum thus created, the journal *L'Echo des Sports*, rival of *L'Équipe*, became involved in rugby league promotion. On the last day of 1933, in Paris, there was an exhibition between the British XIII and the then touring Kangaroos led by Frank 'Skinny' McMillan and featuring Dave Brown, who scored a record-breaking 285 points on tour. Both sets of players were under instructions to let the game flow, and with the pressure of their British tour ended, Australia beat England 63–13. Amongst the spectators was a famous rugby footballer and ex-heavyweight boxing champion, Jean Galia, a 28-year-old Catalan businessman from Perpignan. He was under a shadow from the French Rugby Union for offering money to players to switch clubs. Galia went down to the Midi again and gathered other players, and even though he had a chain of cinemas to run, toured England playing rugby league. In 1934 the French played all the leading British clubs and an England representative team. Galia's Boys were a sensation, attracted great crowds and their flair enabled them to produce scores which have a modern ring to them — for example, 30–27 against Wigan at Central Park in March. On their return to France, they set up the *The Ligue Française de Rugby à XIII* at 47 Faubourg Montmatre, Paris 9, that spring, with Galia as a committee member. At the Stade Buffalo in Paris in April, seven miles out from the centre of town, the French Rugby Federation having influenced officials to deny them the use of a more convenient ground, the Frenchmen played an English team before a home crowd and were beaten 32–21, in a game which did nothing to diminish the passion of the French for the new game. The Fédération Française de Rugby responded by banning administrators, players, and even the pitches on which the league demonstrations had taken place.



Queenslander Duncan Hall was a 1948 tourist and a member of the 1950 side that won back the Ashes.

By the time that World War II had broken out, *Les Tricolores*, or the *Treizistes* had played 13 enthusiastic internationals against England, Wales and Australia. 'The Second World War', writes Geoffrey Moorhouse,⁴ 'was a disaster for Rugby à Treize such as no other rugby league playing country even remotely experienced'. Ominously, the rugby league grand final of 1940, due to be played on 19 May, never took place because of the Nazi invasion of 10 May.

The defeat of the French and British armies in France in 1940 led to the establishment of a directly German Nazi government in the north of France, and a southern puppet government under the aging Marshal Pétain operating from Vichy, a spa town to the north-west of Lyons. The FFR had its hooks firmly into the Vichy administration.

Marshal Pétain's government was both collaborative with the Nazis, and yet felt the shame of having been so easily overrun by them. Even though genuinely amateur rugby league clubs outnumbered the professionals by as many of 14 to one, Pétain saw treizistes as bearing the shame of frankly stated professionalism, and overt professionalism did not fit the great virtues of his new collaborationist state, whose hoped-for strengths he expressed in the slogan: Work, Fatherland and Family (*Travail, Patrie, Famille*). The Ministry of National Education and Youth was run by a former Wimbledon and thus supposedly amateur tennis champion Jean Borotra, the Bounding Basque, and he would be assisted and eventually succeeded by Colonel Jép Pascot who had played fly-half for the French rugby team in the 1920s.

A conjunction of Pétain's attitudes, Pascot's allegiances, and the French rugby union's opportunism produced from Vichy a shameful ordinance which Pétain himself signed, number 5285, decree of 19 December 1941. Its first article stated 'the association called French Ligue de Rugby à Treize, whose offices are at 24 Rue Drouet, Paris, is dissolved, assent having been refused it'. The rugby league headquarters were raided and plundered of documents and, according to some historians, torched. It is interesting, and an eloquent proof of Vichy's closeness to the Nazi occupiers that Vichy could pass edicts to dissolve property located in Paris, the Nazi-governed north. Article 2 read: 'The patrimony of the association dissolved by virtue of the preceding article is transferred without modification to the National Committee of Sports'. Leading rugby league teams were to be forcibly amalgamated with the FFR. No such inhibitions were placed upon the other rugby code, despite the British-ness of the name *Rugby*, or on any other sport. The Vichy government, with the assistance of the Fédération Française de Rugby sent teams on training excursions and camps which



Two 1951 French tourists are concerned about the possible injury to one of their team.

involved training in the values of the new order. Many claim that there were secret wartime games of thirteen-a-side, and many treizistes were certainly associated with the Maquis, the French Resistance, including Paul Barrière, who would live to fit out the 1948-49 Kangaroos with new hats on a cold morning at the start of 1949.

When the Australians arrived for that first game in France, rugby league had been the beneficiary of a wave of support from anti-Nazi, anti-Vichy sentiment. Indeed, as the Nazis had retreated in 1944, some treizistes had taken revenge on rugby facilities of Vichy-favoured clubs, such as the Perpignan club, and few seemed to blame them. The code of 13 possessed the attraction of having been amongst the Nazi's victims. That, and the freer, slightly less forward-dominated aspects of rugby league gave it some advantages. Nonetheless, the Ministry of Sport had already decided in 1947, two years before John Graves led the Australians in a performance of their war cry from the stage of the Marseilles Opera, and after considerable lobbying by the FFR, that the treizistes, loyal as many of them had been to France, would not have the right to call their game rugby à treize. They were henceforth to be the *jeu de treize*, the game of thirteen. Shamateurism had prevailed in French rugby during the war, and still prevailed, and yet



Johnny Wacker Graves led the team in their war cry on the stage of the Marseilles Opera.

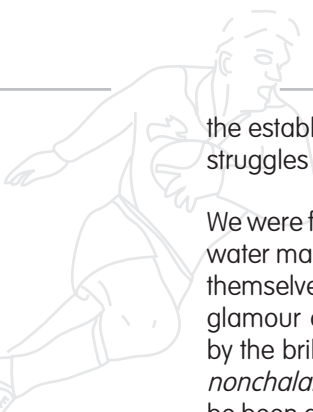
the lip service so strenuously paid to amateurism by rugby seemed as desirable to the post-war republic as it had to Vichy. Ultimately rugby league's frankly avowed professionalism could not compete in the south-west of France, many rugby players could not afford either in terms of status or of financial remuneration, to turn professional players of the *jeu de treize*.

The cry then, as during Vichy, was — to quote the title of a recent French film documentary made by Aurelie Luneau on this scandal — *A bas le XIII, vive le XV!*

The Australians, then, arriving to play le XIII, had themselves been stung by the press accusation that they were having too good a time in the south of France, and applied themselves for the test at the Stade Municipal in Marseilles, where they played so well to win 29–10 that the French players and officials could not believe that they had been beaten by the British. The second test in Bordeaux was tougher but the Australians won 10–0.

Now a campaign-weary set of Kangaroos would leave France to play the last test against Britain, which perhaps predictably they lost, thereby deepening the Australian thirst for dominance. It would be at last achieved by narrow margins in 1950, when the Lions again toured Australia.

As for the French, the shameful attempts to oppress professional and amateur rugby league in the name of shamateur rugby union which had flourished under the Nazis, would continue. Treizistes would not win back from the Ministry of Youth and Sport the right to call themselves players of a form of rugby for three-and-a-half decades. An organisation named XIII-Actif is engaged in attempting to recompense treizistes in every area of France who suffered personal discrimination for their attachment to the game we love. Indeed, a member of XIII-Actif depicts the resistance of the treizistes to the Vichy and the Nazis in terms which may make one's head spin but which I think have a certain validity: in their resistance, the towns of Midi were 'continuing at a radical tradition of opposition to



the establishment that goes back centuries to the Cathar and Protestant struggles against the Roman Catholic Inquisition of the Middle Ages’.

We were fortunate here in Australia to see French rugby league at its high water mark, when the French Rugby League — they were allowed to call themselves that here — arrived in 1951. There was still a little residual glamour of anti-Nazi resistance attaching to the French, who were led by the brilliant Puig ‘Pipette’ Aubert. He was lucky that the French words *nonchalance* and *flamboyance* were available to describe him, for had he been an Australian he would have been called a mug lair. Ray French would write that, visiting St Helens, ‘I can still see the small, round, tubby shape of French fullback leaning against the fencing, chatting ... Such was his apparent nonchalance towards the activities of his team mates that he even smoked a cigarette, kindly offered by a spectator’. Puig-Aubert’s French team — the extraordinary half-back Jean Dop, the crushing winger Constrastin, the impermeable French forwards, faced a splendid team lead by Clive Churchill and including an old friend of mine, Gordon Willoughby, who scored a try at the first test, though France won 26–15. Australia won the second test in Brisbane, and with a crowd of 67,000 at the Sydney Cricket Ground, the French defeated Australia 35–14.



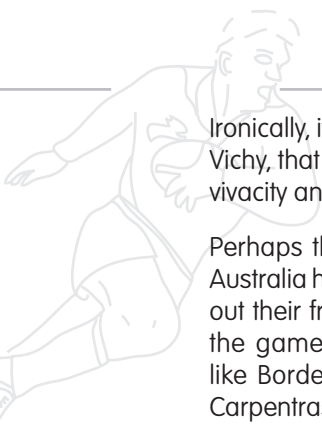
The 1951 French team. The charismatic Puig-Aubert is second from the front.



French player Edouard 'Ponpon' Ponsinet tries to halt the progress of Australian player Brian Davies in a test played in 1951 at the SCG.

French rugby league has never been more alive than it was in the antipodes in those days, the men of the French South making whoopee in the deepest south short of Antarctica that one can find. Puig-Aubert was a legend with us schoolboys. He placed the ball, he turned his back on it, took three paces, turned again, sauntered in, kicked the goal. In his world one could have imposed a penalty for more than 20 seconds for a goal kick, and he would never have violated it; and he could defend like a terrier, despite the stories that he thought it was the forwards' business to do this. For us, Puig-Aubert was the reason why the French have not really lost the war. But sadly, rugby league, which the Nazis could not wipe out, would lose the war with the FFR, and its allies in government.

For a time however, it flourished still. Barrière was the sort of entrepreneurial genius every sport needs, and yet he unwittingly contributed to the decline of the *Jeu de Treize*. His concept was of a Rugby League World Cup in 1954, with the French putting up 25 million francs to underwrite the competition's finances. But in the final at the Parc des Princes in Paris, Great Britain narrowly beat France. It may have been an expensive defeat for French Rugby League. France's rugby team won its first Five Nations the same year. Much was made of *French Rugby à champagne* and *le 'French flair'*.



Ironically, it was particularly from 1958 and under de Gaulle, the enemy of Vichy, that rugby union was elevated to the status of a symbol of national vivacity and flair, and part of the national *patrimoine*.

Perhaps the league administration in countries like Great Britain and Australia has at various stages proved too insular or felt powerless to help out their friends in the French Midi. Rugby league is still *par excellence* the game, at amateur or modest semi-professional level, in towns like Bordeaux, Perpignan, Carcassonne, Villeneuve, Lyons, Toulouse, Carpentras and Avignon. At the highest level, however, it is as weak as Pétain could have hoped.



Saints' Ken Kearney takes the full-brunt of an English 'headlock' tackle in the NSW-England game in 1954 — which referee Aub Oxford abandoned.

I believe rugby league has too little a sense of its history, and too little appreciation of the struggle people have made to play it — whether it is the case of a dairy farmer's son in remote NSW pleading with his father to let him turn up bare-footed in time to play in some forgotten local game in the 1920s, or the war-battered Brits dragging together a team of barely de-mobbed players lacking in match practice, or the touring Kangaroos choking on Ma Griffen's consummately stewed brussel sprouts, or the French treizistes reeling under two levels of tyranny in World War II. It is a delight to have a chance to remember and honour them, all of them, here, amongst sympathetic listeners, in the slight stillness before the whistle is blown, and the rage begins.



Endnotes

1 Geoffrey Moorhouse, *A People's Game: The Centenary History of Rugby League Football, 1895–1995*, Hodder & Stoughton, London, 1995, p. 208.

2 Ian Heads, *The Kangaroos: The Saga of Rugby League's Great Tours*, Lester-Townsend Publishing, Sydney, 1990, p. 119.

3 Heads, *The Kangaroos*, p. 114.

4 Moorhouse, *A People's Game*, p. 176.



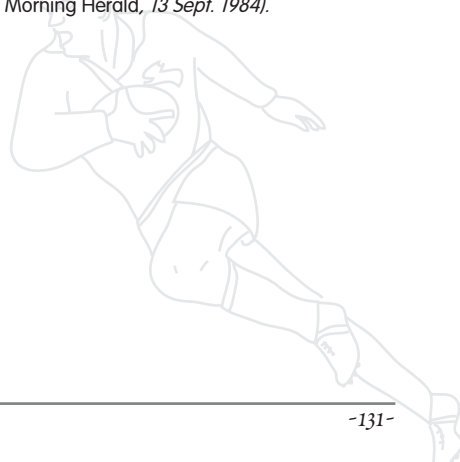
The Great Fibro versus Silvertail Wars

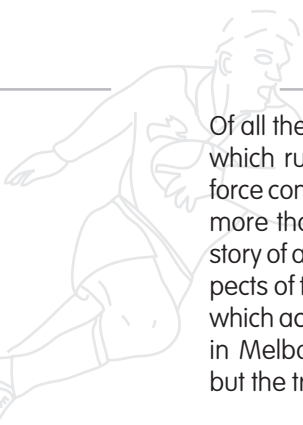
21 September 2005,
NSW Leagues Club, Sydney

Roy Masters



*The svengali of Lidcombe
(courtesy of Moir and the Sydney
Morning Herald, 13 Sept. 1984).*





Of all the strange currents and vectors which rule our lives, what mysterious force conspired to have me reveal, after more than a quarter of a century, the story of a war on World Peace Day? Aspects of the bitter Fibro-Silvertail rivalry, which actually began on 18 March 1978 in Melbourne, have been whispered but the truth never told in its entirety.

As coach of the Fibros, I have entered the annals of demonology on Sydney's northern beaches and am proud to say I'm still welcome in Fibroland. But tonight's lecture is not an attempt to justify the past, merely to chronicle it and I do quote my critics.

It's an eyewitness account, in retrospect, without censorship. It's popular history seen through the eyes of what might, today, be called an embedded journalist, without the stamp of approval of the NRL.

A cross between Samuel Pepys's diary of the great fire of London and Patton's blood-and-guts thrust through Europe, a diary account of a participant but with commentary from other eyewitnesses, some critical.

We love rivalries because they force coaches, those creatures of regimentation and habit who would never look past this week's opponent, to acknowledge the truth. Some games are more important than others.

The truth is, nothing in my ten-year coaching career and 18 years in the media thereafter, surpassed the Wests-Manly rivalry, in football terms, the two most bitter rivals since Athens and Sparta.

Melbourne was the genesis of the Fibro-Silvertail war, a divide which persists in loyal Magpie pockets on the northern beaches, a clash which created huge TV audiences, big crowds, a multitude of cut eyes and bloodied noses, but no broken jaws or serious long-term injuries.



*A man never short of an idea
(Courtesy of Ian Heads,
Roy Masters and Moir of the
Sydney Morning Herald).*

Four games were played in 1978: a pre-season match at the Junction Oval, St Kilda, Melbourne; premierships matches at Lidcombe and Brookvale and a preliminary final at the SCG.

The first game, won by Manly but a Pyrrhic victory with five Sea Eagles taken to hospital by ambulance, may well have set rugby league's cause in the Victorian capital back 20 years because it wasn't until 1998 that the Storm was established in Melbourne.

I now live half the week in the winter time in Melbourne, regularly attending Storm matches, as some form of redemption for retarding the southern growth of the great game.

I was also the only first grade coach to welcome the Swans when they came to Sydney to stay in 1983 and coach Ricky Quade introduced every one of the 50 in his squad on the stage of the Opera House.

Even then I was probably trying to redeem my behaviour of five years earlier, welcoming a new code to a new city, acting charitably as I should have in 1978 when that game at St Kilda, supposed to be an exhibition of skill, turned into a bloodbath.

Ernest Hemingway could have been talking about me when he wrote in *African Journal* Part 2: 'He carried remorse with him as a man might carry a baboon on his shoulder. Remorse is a splendid name for a racehorse but a poor life time companion for a man.'

Wests and Manly had finished just below the two Wills Cup finalists in the official pre-season competition of 1978 and the play off for third place was in Melbourne. Both teams travelled down by plane and the atmosphere was chilly, particularly when the plane was diverted to Essendon airport by fog.

We grouped separately at the small secondary airport, waiting for a bus which was obviously waiting at Tullamarine. Eventually one turned up and the Manly players filed aboard first, consistent with the born-to-rule syndrome which I attached to them. We assumed another bus was to carry us to our hotel and we continued to stand on the concrete until I said to Les Boyd, the fort on feet I'd recruited from Cootamundra, that I sensed both teams were to travel on the same bus.

Les and I entered, sat down and Ray Higgs, who had clearly not seen us board, began making snide remarks about the Wests players standing



(Courtesy, Telegraph. 18 Aug. 1992).

outside. Maybe he didn't like Dallas's ugh boots, or Sloth's Canadian jacket, or Snake's polyester flares but he derided us, perhaps to curry favour with his new Manly team-mates, having left Parramatta at the end of the previous year following a pre grand-final dispute with coach Terry Fearnley.

Boyd began to puff up like an angry toad and, with eyes bulging and knuckles whitening, he hissed to me he was getting off the bus.

Eventually a St Kilda official arrived and informed us both teams were travelling on the same bus and staying at the same hotel.

Manly chief executive Ken Arthurson objected to the accommodation arrangements and insisted Wests be dropped at the designated hotel and he would find the Sea Eagles another.

The mood therefore was one crackling with menace and, the truth is, my first big game coaching in the big time. It suited by a bad blood view of rugby league. Confrontation lies at the essence of sport, even cricket. Batter v. bowler, or in baseball, batter versus pitcher. For some, rugby league is still ARL versus Super League.

I sat with a woman at a Wests Tigers lunch before the 2003 Roosters versus Penrith grand final. She was a life-long Balmain supporter and indicated she would be cheering for the Roosters. Insofar as this match was being

promoted as the battlers from the west against 'the new Manly', the Nick Politis-led Bondi Junction team with plenty of money and even more influence, I expressed the view I thought a supporter of a team who had its origins around the waves would support the Panthers. 'They're a Super League team', she said with disgust.

I pondered whether this undermined my view that sociological warfare is the basis of sport but I eventually concluded Rupert's millions can change the demography of entire countries. Interestingly, only two clubs were never approached to join Super League: Souths and Wests.

Anyway, the St Kilda dressing room became a great psychiatrist's couch for my core belief that confrontation is the core of rugby league: attack versus defence, ball carrier against tackler, Wests wives in denim opposed to Manly wives in fur, corporate box versus standing on the hill, hot pies versus cucumber sandwiches.

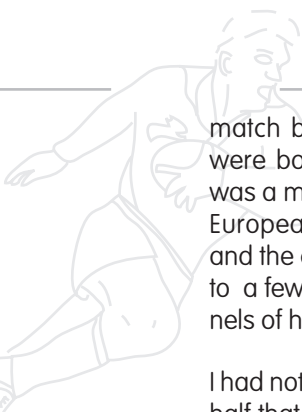
I knew I didn't have to deconstruct any of the psyches inside that seething dressing room — Raudonikis, who lived for a time in a migrant camp at Cowra, Dallas from Gunnedah's abattoirs, Sloth from the timber town of Oberon, Graeme O'Grady from Liverpool, Ron Giteau from Blacktown, Joe 'Cool' Dorahy from a Lidcombe butchery and others from the inappropriately named western suburb of Regents Park. There was something universal about that Wests team that I didn't ever see again, a psychological unity born from similar socio-economic backgrounds that meant they were always singing off the same hymn sheet.

They relished the dressing room universe of biting sarcasm and evil tricks, tormenting each other with fervour and affection. Nothing was sacred. No-one ever had to offer a penny for someone else's thoughts.

There was universal, instinctive hatred of the image I painted of Manly's beach culture — handsome half John Gibbs with sunglasses parked in his blond hair climbing out of a Mazda RS7 on the boulevard at Manly.

I knew that when it comes to the temperature of their conflict. Manly v. Wests was 20 degrees above the others.

When Manly played an aggressive first half and the Wests players entered the sheds complaining, I released the hounds. Unfortunately, my half-time talk was taped by the earnest president of the St Kilda club who had been invited into the room to learn about rugby league. The rugby league game had actually been preceded by an AFL game and a soccer



match but when they were both over, there was a mass exodus of European Australians and the crowd thinned to a few curious sentinels of history.

I had noticed in the first half that the two touch judges had little idea that a linesman has two responsibilities: to act on incidents in back play and adjudicate where the ball goes into touch. Because they were Melburnians, the two touchies only concentrated on the flight of the ball, as though they were boundary umpires in AFL. I therefore gave the order that every time a Manly kicker dispatched the ball downfield, the second marker had to fly at him like a missile and put him on his back.



*Tom Raudonikis — looked just a clean-cut kid when he won the 1972 Rothman's Medal. He was of course **far** fiercer than that.*

This was the tactic which was basically responsible for John Gray, John Gibbs and others leaving the ground courtesy of St John's ambulance.

I now see a lot of John Gray, having dinner with him at his Lavender Bay unit, following a fall he had from a balcony which makes it difficult for him to walk. Gray and some of the Magpies would occasionally meet at Lui Rose restaurant, Concord for dinner after those bloody battles, so I consider him an honorary Magpie.

I've raised the Melbourne battle in my conversations with Gray and he says, I quote:

It was a bloodbath. They hit me like a missile. I said to Jack Danzey, the referee, 'Hey Jack'. We used to go to the same church. I said, 'This is supposed to be a model demonstration game'. It was a blood fest.

I remember coming away with stitches in my eye and chin, Bob Higham, our club doctor sewed my chin up with loose stitches. He was a gynaecologist. When I got to Sydney I had 26 micro stitches put in my chin. But amazingly, we all got on a bus together after the match and drank beer together all the way back to Sydney.

Jack Danzey refereed quite a few Manly-Wests games and I remember speaking to him years later and he said, with a semi-excited stutter, 'I'd wake up on Sunday morning when I had a Manly-Wests game and I'd start to tingle'. When Jack had a heart attack in the mid-80s, I knew who was responsible.

The man in charge of the next encounter with Manly, Dennis Braybrook, also had a heart attack about the same time and later died.

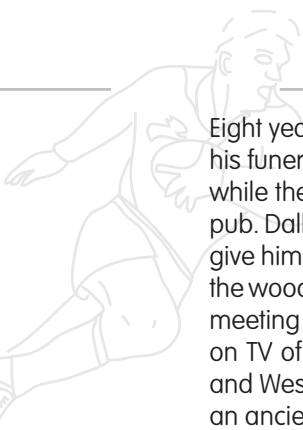
The media had already anticipated, indeed partly precipitated the fury of the next game in 1978 with headlines such as, 'Battle of Lidcombe Shaping Like a Lulu'. Getting violence and sex into one headline was uncommon then but a Wests fan, noting the hypocrisy of the media salivating at the prospect of an all-in brawl and then condemning it when it happens, wrote a poem:

The media declare it's violence we dread,
You can savour the scenes in our full colour spread.

The fans certainly sensed a brutal battle and Lidcombe sizzled.

I intimidated prop John Donnelly in the dressing room, questioning his preparation because someone had reported him drinking eight schooners at the Railway Hotel the evening before. The limit I imposed in those days was three — enough to get you to sleep — probably not enough for someone who weighed 130kg — but far more than today's players who are so fit, their body fat percentage resembles the interest rate on a current account.

That finger stabbing, personal space invading tirade by me against Dallas in front of the whole team, predicting Manly's Terry Randall would dominate him, ended with him looking at me through refrigerated eyes and saying, 'You'll know how I'm going to go today after one minute'.



Eight years later, when Dallas drowned in the surf at Byron Bay, I went to his funeral in Gunnedah and later to his parents' home for a small wake while the town and a DC3 full of footballers from Sydney adjourned to a pub. Dallas's father Rocky was grief stricken and only one thing seemed to give him any relief. He invited me to sit with him behind the garage, near the woodheap, and asked me to go through every detail of that pre-game meeting at Lidcombe that May Sunday in 1978. Rocky had seen the match on TV of course, with Dallas confronting Randall in the opening minute and Wests won easily and Rocky seemed pleased, as if the final piece in an ancient jigsaw puzzle had finally been placed.

Dallas provided some humorous incidents, in retrospect. John Gray says:

A scrum collapsed and Bruce Gibbs was there as well. His gut was bigger. Dallas flopped on me. He pinned me. My head was on the ground and my eyes were skyward but his gut enveloped my face. I was gurgling and gasping for breath. I couldn't speak. I couldn't turn my head. When I tried to break away, Dallas's gut kept coming into my mouth. I was in a panic. No-one was getting up. Dallas knew he had me. My arms were pinned. Every time I attempted to breath, all I got was a mouthful of fat. I was anticipating getting near his navel and hoped I'd find a little bit of space but couldn't. I tried to bite him but the volume was too much. Eventually, his great gut must have released an air pocket and it created a bit of space near his naval and I finally gulped in some air.

But the ramifications of the match were enormous, with Dallas and Les Boyd cited on TV evidence. Manly's Stephen Knight, a former Wests player, had been sent off but no Wests player had been punished by more than a penalty.

It seemed to us, Arko, the Manly chief executive whose surname always had the mandatory adjective 'astute' preceding it in every newspaper article about him, had lobbied for action from Phillip Street. Anyway, Boyd and Donnelly were both suspended and it was about this time, Phillip Street called in St George and Parramatta players and their coaches, together with those from Manly and Wests, to protest about the darkening nimbus of aggression gathering above the game.

Ron Casey, then prominent in TV and newspapers, rang and warned me the NSWRL had a copy of the tape given them by the shocked St Kilda president. As I recall, Ron and I concocted a story about taping without permission and the injustice of ambush material presented at disciplinary hearings and the matter wasn't raised. Ron got his story and I got off, an early example of how the media and clubs cooperated then, as they occasionally do today.

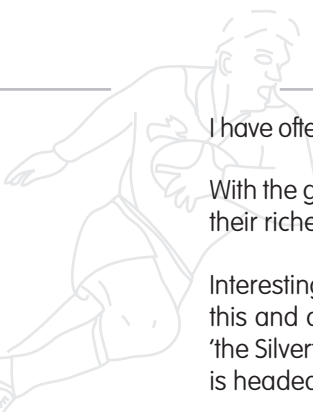


Ken Arthurson (right) greets Manly's own hard man Mal Reilly. Arko's surname always had the mandatory adjective 'astute' preceding it in every newspaper article.

The fibro and silvertail tags were in widespread use by then, two terms which rolled off the tongue easily. I got the fibro from the houses I

saw as I drove to training with Tommy Raudonikis from Blacktown and the silvertail came from a term I saw in a Frank Hardy novel. Wests supporters began to dress down for games and become curiously quiet if they lived in a bluestone house in Strathfield. I knew a pharmacist from Ashfield who left his chemist shop at noon on Saturdays, drove home, took off his coat and tie, wore a boilersuit to Lidcombe and carried two narrow slats of fibro, nailed at the bottom of one end. He stood on the hill, holding the fibro pieces in front of him opening them to a V when we scored a try. Warren Boland, Wests captain in 1980-81, told me recently, 'For a long time I had a piece of fibro, about six inches by two inches. A fan gave it to me. I don't know why I kept it but it seemed to have symbolised something.'

Manly retaliated by trying to expose us for being, as Bob Fulton once accused me, 'Closet Silvertails'. Ken Arthurson was quoted in the papers in 1980, noting our club doctor, Bob McInerney drove a Rolls Royce, our president King Billy Carson owned a Mercedes and the third grade coach, Ken Gentle, a property valuer, had a Saab. Arko also resurrected the Wests era in the late 1950s when the club was known as 'the Millionaires' because the licensed club at Ashfield had bought big-name players.



I have often thought that Manly played it wrong, trying to dress down to us.

With the glittering array of talent at the club, they should have proclaimed their riches, daring people to beat them, confident of their superior skill.

Interestingly, after a quarter of a century, Manly have finally woken up to this and a group of local businessmen have a box at Brookvale named 'the Silvertails' and raise money for the club. An unofficial Manly web site is headed 'The Silvertails'.

A confession. I have actually helped them raise money by debating last year's Tom Brock speaker, Tom Keneally, at their invitation. Manly officials now admit, after the rejection of Gosford and the Northern Eagles, they actually prefer to be loathed than loved.

Another admission. The siege mentality, the league is out to get us, view of the universe I preached is, in the long run, essentially self-defeating.



Wayne Bennett was 'the only coach I have seen successfully combine a siege mentality with expansive play'.

It encourages you to look inwards, to play negatively, to feel inferior to the opposition and not to risk take.

The only coach I have seen successfully combine a siege mentality with expansive play, and deserve to be part of football on a long-term basis, is Brisbane's Wayne Bennett. His Queensland players forever moan about southern injustice at the judiciary and with referees and Bennett fuels it but they discard the chip when they take the field, playing a loosey, goosey style.

Yet there was curious comfort at Lidcombe about being the league's despised club.

When I was attempting to find a very inspirational pre-match speech for the team before the next encounter against the Silver-tails in 1978, I unashamedly mined the speeches of Winston Churchill to find an appropriate one. 'Hitler has said he will wring the neck of England like the neck of a chicken.' Some chicken, some neck, seemed relevant.



Did Kevin Humphreys really say that he would wring the neck of the Magpie?

So I recounted the recent history of discrimination by the NSWRL against Wests: the suspensions on video evidence, the first players in premierships history to be cited, not on what the ref saw but what he didn't, and other perceived, imagined, injustices. Finally, I said in reference to Kevin Humphreys, the then president of the NSWRL, 'Humphreys has said he will wring the neck of the Magpie. Some magpie. Some neck.' Dr McInerney, who never missed a diatribe, pulled me aside and asked, 'Did Humphreys really say that?' 'No', I whispered. 'It's bullshit'. Dr McInerney replied, 'It doesn't matter. It's the type of thing he would have said, anyway.'

Les Boyd, a life-long capitalist who now owns half of Cootamundra and has only ever voted Liberal, was never comfortable with the oppression of the working-class view I expressed via rugby league and Wests.

'I don't believe that bullshit you tell us', he volunteered after a tempestuous game, an hour after his eyes had retracted into his head. 'But I make myself believe it.'

Wests identification with fibro didn't help us when we went in search of a sponsor. One of our well-meaning committee men, John Cochrane,



Les Boyd, life-long capitalist. 'The Fort on Feet' was lured to Manly by the big money.

once walked into the offices of James Hardie and explained how we were known as the Fibros, a material they produced. The manager abused him, pointing out fibro was excellent building material and there were fibro homes in salubrious suburbs and how dare he associate it with a working-class team. Cochrane scurried away and not so long afterwards, James Hardie announced a sponsorship with Parramatta. Given the company's record with respiratory problems, I'm relieved we never carried its name on our chests.

Victa Motor Mowers sponsored us and we had the name on the jerseys when the Brookvale game was played in 1978. Afterwards, I remarked to a representative of the sponsor, a serious-minded chap, that he should sell plenty of lawnmowers based on the game. 'Yes, but none over here', he muttered.

A story circulated, which former Manly international prop, Ian Thomson, confirms occurred, that Manly coach Frank Stanton, in an attempt to match the crazy motivational tactics of the Lidcombe Svengali, recruited a Vietnam war hero to address his troops. Manly thought we were mad, whereas, we knew we were not just a good team but a good team that was mad. The army major arrived by helicopter at Brookvale Oval, flouting air regulations, according to our spies. He spoke of team work, sacrifice, physical and mental courage, survival and even ripped open his battle dress to reveal bullet holes.

He jutted out his square, militaristic jaw and said, 'Any questions?'

Ian Martin, Manly's much under-rated five eighth, nicknamed 'Ima' from the popular TV series, 'I'm A Martian', put up his hand. 'Ima' was consid-



Rival (Manly) coach Frank Stanton (centre) in a happier 1978 moment — on the Kangaroo tour.

ered the least of the Manly players to be impressed by rhetoric and his interest was interpreted as a huge victory for the strategy of importing the major. 'Yes', said the major, inviting Ima to speak. 'Can I have a ride in your helicopter?' Ima asked.

The truth is, Wests prime tactic was to ignite a brawl early and then revert to football while the opposition spent 80 minutes seeking to get square.

We always believed, in the hysteria of the publicity, our football talents were grossly undervalued and actually hoped the opposition would think of us only as brawlers.

Manly won the only really important match that year — the final at the SCG refereed by Greg Hartley who was promoted from reserve grade towards the end of the premiership rounds. We found our match in him with his intimidation, threatening us with, 'I'll get you black bastards under the posts'. If only referees were wired then.

Scrum penalties allowing kicks at goal then existed, the drawn grand final the year before resulting in three of the five goals kicked coming from scrums. Hartley disallowed two Wests tries and went away as travelling referee with the Kangaroos. It turned into the start of a brand new bray.

Hartley and Arko were mates and, let's face it, if you have the richest team, you've got to win. It's like Chelsea, owned by the Russian oil baron and Real Madrid. You don't go to watch them play as much as you go to see them pay off. Anyway, all we got from the loss was more ammunition for our psyches — more bullets to fire about injustice.



*A smiling Greg Hartley:
'I'll get you black bastards
under the posts'.*

The following year, 1979, Manly had a poor season and missed the play offs. To us, that was like Bill Gates walking down the road with a petrol can, or Paris Hilton staying at the Peoples Palace. But Arko retaliated by targeting three Wests players: John Dorahy, Ray Brown and Boyd.

The plan was to ruin our future semi-final prospects and fortify their own.

One night at training, during the '79 semis, as the Wests players ran their lap of Lidcombe, I noticed the three hang back at the rear of the peloton.

I asked Tom Raudonikis, the captain, what was up and he told me they were discussing a big offer by Manly.

Players being destabilised by big offers mid season is a challenge but in the late 70s it tended to happen at season end. Despite the NRL's anti-tampering 30 June deadline, this 40-year-old problem can only effectively be countered with a draft.

The infamous *Sixty Minutes* footage, showing Wests players face slapping, was shot in the Lidcombe dressing room before a match against Manly in 1979. Ray Martin was the reporter on the story and in his initial approach to the club, raised the suggestion that the energy Wests players expended was fuelled by pharmaceuticals. We were incensed and offered him entry to everything at the club for a six-week period. All he found was face slapping and a fiery exchange by Boyd and Brown, replayed four times in the quarter-hour segment.



One of ours, Ray Brown (right, with Geoff Gerard to the left) also took the bait at Manly.

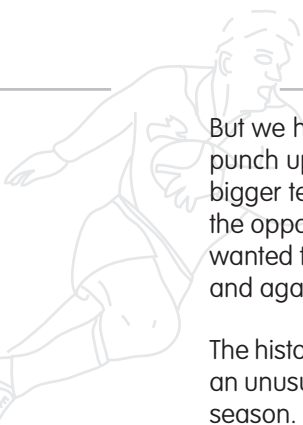
The reaction in Phillip Street to the show was furious. Delegate after delegate stood and said how they were appalled, including Manly.

When Wests and Manly met at a Brookvale match in 1980, the Sea Eagles ran onto the field with blood pouring from Randall's nose, the victim of a fierce dressing room slap up with Boyd.

After having been reviled for introducing it and witnessing St George Illawarra coach Nathan Brown do it to three players on the sideline at WIN Stadium, now, when I hear a coach slaps, I reckon I should get a royalty.

There was mass exodus of Wests players in 1979 — three for Manly and Tom Raudonikis and Graeme O'Grady to Newtown and John Singleton's riches. Of course our enemies blamed the face slapping. To them, the once stable club was looking more and more like a bizarre 'Survivor' cast, as if getting off the island was the only goal. But we knew money was our problem and Wests recruited far and wide. Rich clubs think the most important thing in football is spirit. Poor clubs know it is money.

We identified Terry Lamb in the Canterbury junior league, Jim Leis in Tamworth, John Ribot at Newtown, Ted Goodwin from Newtown, Paul Merlo from Penrith and Ross Conlon from teachers' college. All quickly identified with the Wests ethos, Goodwin reporting for training at Lidcombe in a torn black T shirt and ragged shorts, he later confessing to me he thought old clothes would impress me. Leis played for Australia that year, as did Ribot in his new position of wing, Merlo played for NSW and, of course, Lamb became an icon of the game and Conlon later represented Australia.



But we had to change our tactics. Only Dallas was really interested in a punch up. We became movers of the ball, spreading it quickly, tiring the bigger teams, the same approach as today's Wests Tigers. Interestingly, the opposition sought to match us, just as our opponents in the late '70s wanted to brawl. So the big teams tried to play our style of touch football and again weren't suited for it.

The history and heartache of the two-year Fibro v. Silvertail battle came to an unusual head-to-head denouement in the opening match of the 1980 season. In a brilliant piece of scheduling, the NSWRL, allegedly anxious to avoid Manly-Wests bloodbaths, drew the two teams to meet at Lidcombe on 20 April, aware three former Magpies had switched clubs. The distilling process would guarantee this much: one team would come away with a new reason to dislike the other.

The Wests players were so pumped up they needed drool buckets.

A tremendous wall of sound rose up when Wests ran out, the kind of roar that comes not just from the throat but from the soul. The muscular chorus of boos seemed fuelled more by bile than beer. Dallas stood on the sideline and reviled the Silvertails with evil words, basically saying what Wests team with two internationals (himself and Goodwin) would do to Manly's ten.

It worked. The game was played in a gathering rage and when Ray Brown walked over in a conciliatory, caring way, sticking his head into a posse of Wests players examining our prone halfback, Alan Neil, Dallas told Brown to piss off. Wests won 19-4 and when the Wests faithful belched and farted and leered at Manly as they left the field, Arko had the hide to call us ungracious.

But the year was played with a patented formula of individual opportunism, selflessness, innovative game planning and emotion fuelled by perceived disrespect, rather than a feeling of socio-economic disadvantage.

Bozo Fulton, a former Manly player and later Manly coach, then was in charge of the Roosters.

He was convinced our almost invincible record at Lidcombe was the result of listening bugs I had placed in the visitor's dressing room. So he arranged for all his players to dress at the home of halfback Kevin Hastings who, bizarrely, lived at Lidcombe. The players arrived by furniture truck and beat us, fortifying the myth of a bugged dressing room.

Bozo, or a Roosters official, even played an evil motivational trick, which I discovered when I arrived for work at a western suburbs high school the following day. The school clerk, an aunt of Hastings, lacerated me, saying she could not believe I would be capable of such evil. It transpired someone handed Hastings a note requesting he ring a nearby hospital because a family member was seriously injured in an accident.

He made the call; no-one was injured and when he inquired of a Roosters official the source of the note, was told it was handed over by a Wests official and probably something that Masters cooked up.

In 1982, I moved to St George and Terry Fearnley tried to change Wests culture, ostensibly consistent with the 'turn the other cheek' ethos he had established at Parramatta. Boland once said of the difference between Fearnley and myself: 'If a heavy squall of rain came, Terry would quietly open an umbrella. Roy would stand out in the rain, defying lightning to strike him.'

Boland also recalls us travelling to a trial game at Young and again, there was no bus to meet us. 'There was a copper on the plane and the paddy waggon met him at the airport', Boland recalls. 'We all piled in the back and were driven to the cop shop in the main street. We all climbed out, a Saturday morning, and I remember thinking how appropriate the Wests boys have arrived by paddy waggon.'

Fearnley stayed at Wests one year and took seven players with him, committing the same sin as Ray Brown. The Magpies never mind anyone leaving, but you can't use the joint. Sadly, maybe god thinks the same way.

Steve 'Pee Wee' Anderson, a brilliant young centre, was one of the players Fearnley signed. 'Pee Wee' didn't grow up to be a Magpie, or even play with the Sharks, being killed in a car accident in the off season of 1982.

Fearnley cost King Billy Carson the presidency because the rest of the committee wanted Laurie Freier, who had coached Wests to a reserve grade premiership in my final year, as first grade coach. Freier did eventually get the job but by then he had been coach at Easts and tarted up his attire. He made the infamous error of coming to games at Campbelltown dressed in a light tan leather suit, with a zipper at the rear.

Laurie also supervised training, riding around on a horse, ostensibly because his bad knees prevented him from jogging. Warren Ryan, who coached Wests in the mid-90s, also made the mistake of arriving at Campbelltown by helicopter from his appearances on Channel Seven.



When the great Bob 'Bozo' Fulton became a coach he was convinced our almost invincible record at Lidcombe was the result of listening bugs placed in the visitor's dressing room.

Wests fans don't like their coaches dressing up or travelling in style.

Tom Raudonikis, who understood this, bought a home in Campbelltown when he succeeded Ryan and travelled around the shopping centre in the back of a utility, exhorting the crowd via a loudspeaker to 'come to the game'.

John Bailey, my former assistant coach at the Dragons for six years, also understood the fibro ethos when he succeeded Freier, sacked mid-season. On 7 August 1988 when the new coach assembled his team at Orana Park, Campbelltown, the *SMH* reported Bailey's pre-match address.

It concentrated on what he called, the Claymore Kids:

These are the kids who live in the Housing Commission area at the back of Campbelltown. Nobody drives slow through Claymore because they'll rip your hubcaps off.

I told the Wests players the Claymore Kids didn't come to Orana to watch Manly players like the Haslers, the O'Connors and the Cleals. They came to watch the Blairs, Holcrofts and Troncs. Every Claymore kid aged three to 16 was at Orana to see us beat the moneyed men from Manly.

As soon as I finished my talk, the club came in and promised every player \$500 if we won.

Now, rewarding players with money while simultaneously motivating them to beat those with money may sound hypocritical but double standards have never worried rugby league. Moral dilemmas have rarely troubled the code.

Bailey certainly demonstrated he was the new bearer of the flame in life's long war against the unspeakable Silvertails, telling the *Herald*, 'The Wests officials had tears in their eyes and the players had the love of the club in their hearts'.

Players derive comfort from being thought of as hard hats, men who go to work with steel hats. Calling a player rich and famous would be akin to accusing an iron and steel worker of cross-dressing. It's consistent with the underdog ethos: most teams try and establish themselves as underdogs, drawing comfort from the fact they have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

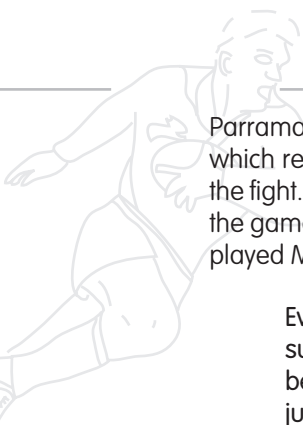
I'm told by a former Eastern Suburbs player that coach Bob Fulton turned this psychology upside down on the eve of the 1980 final against Wests, a humiliation for the Magpies. In a single moment of rare, raw honesty, Fulton impressed the Roosters when he said, 'Roy Masters harps on about fibro houses. Would any of you really want to live in a fibro house? I'm happy with my home at Fairy Bower.'

Yet when Bozo was coach of Manly in the mid-1990s, he beseeched me to write a story in the *SMH* describing the fabulously-talented Sea Eagles as a team of lunch pail men, players who go to work with a cut sandwiches, men who roll their sleeves up and get their hands dirty.

Most teams enjoy underdog status and it's the first thought expressed after a win over a star-studded team.

When Parramatta beat Manly 22–20 in March 1989, coach John Monie said, 'We haven't the brilliant individuals of Manly. We have to graft for everything we do.' Monie admitted his half-time talk was devoted to the club's supporters: 'We've been in the wilderness too long', he said. 'I told my players there were 18,000 people in the stands who wanted to be back in the big time.'

And Manly was unhappy with the tactics. Manly chief executive Doug Daley, pointing to a prostrate Cliff Lyons with ice bags on his groin, said, 'They got him with a Christmas hold. I hope like hell it comes up on the video.'



Parramatta winger Eric Grothe, commenting on a fight he had with Lyons which resulted in a Parramatta try being disallowed, admitted, 'I started the fight. I wouldn't admit it if we lost.' The crowd was highly energised by the game, as they were in the first weekend of the semi-finals when they played Manly and I wrote in the *SMH*:

Even before the confrontation, the differences between the supporters were apparent. Parramatta fans arrived in twos, because that is all they can fit on a motor bike. Manly fans just arrived late. Parramatta fans have nice tattoos. So do their husbands. The Silvertails from the north like to sneak in a nice bottle of red. The Fibros from the west just like to sneak in. Supporters of both clubs like their wine, but Parramatta fans spell it with an 'h'.

Well, the reaction from Parramatta supporters was hostile, one asking whether he should pour all his red wine down a sink and buy a Harley.

They wanted to be thought of as underdogs, but not too far down the social ladder.

There were some contradictory aspects about Lidcombe worth recalling: Wests was the first club to allocate a dry area for families, inconsistent with the view we had a keg in the dressing room. Wests was also the first club to feed journalists, offering tea and scones with cream and strawberry jam, a practice I tolerated because I hoped it would deliver sympathetic copy. We also sent plastic buckets into the crowd, seeking funds when an international rugby union player from Drummoyne was dying with leukaemia.

It's interesting to reflect on the influence the Fibro-Silvertail war had on those Magpie players who represented Wests in the years before 1978, such as Noel Kelly, Chow Hayes, Pat Thomas and co. They are part of a group of 28 former first graders now living on the peninsular and call themselves Fibros. At Wests reunion last month, much was made of the fact they couldn't get down to their local water hole quickly enough the Sunday night after Cronulla had thrashed Manly by a record score.

In preparing this speech, I asked Boland what he recalled of the Fibro years and he reaffirmed my suspicion that I approached all football games as life's best chance to exact revenge. Confrontation was the essence of my view of the universe but sociological differences gave the Fibro-Silvertail

feud a more violent meeting point. 'When we played Manly, you were on about their Porsches', he said.

If it was Canterbury, it was the hypocrisy of the family club. Penrith blokes walked around with a cigarette packet rolled up in the sleeve of their T shirt, tight shorts to impress the sheilas and sun glasses hooked into their hair. You had a line for everyone. It was more about motivation than class warfare. That said, it was more pointed when we played Manly.

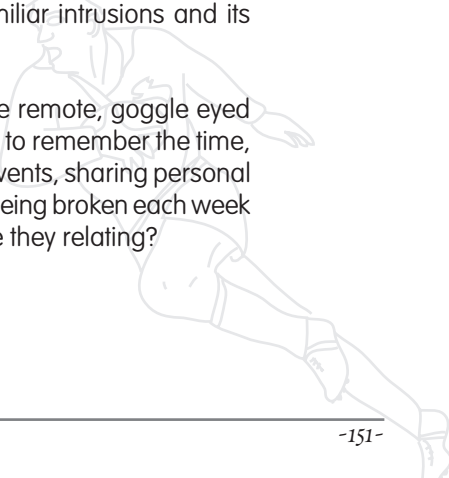
Some will call it Roy Masters puppet theatre of dunderheads but Boland registered one of the highest scores in the HSC in his year. If a successful coach is one who 'can get into your head', I suppose I was living in a three-bedroom fibro between Wests collective cerebrum and cerebral cortex.

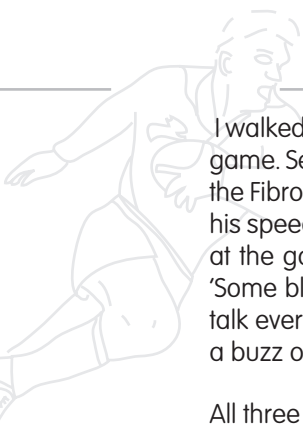
For Boland to recall all this a quarter-century later, it's probably worth reflecting on the effect those Fibro-Silvertail days had in all our lives.

I met up with the son of a NSW deputy premier recently and he enthused about those games, offering a window into his family life where his mother would have toasted sandwiches and cups of cocoa all on trays, ready at 6.30 pm so the entire family could watch Rex Mossop hosting the Fibros against the Silvertails. To be a fan back then was an act of faith and fantasy and sports were ironically far more interactive than anything Bill Gates contrives for us now.

Because I live some of the week in Melbourne and read about American sports, I get the feeling Herculean efforts, such as Plugger's goal tally a few years back, or Sammy Sosa's home run record, or Brett Hodgson's record points tally become quickly shop-worn, a show we've seen once too often, diminished somehow by TV's over familiar intrusions and its endless repetitions.

As we stare into this century, forever fingering the remote, goggle eyed and numb, our greatest act of imagination will be to remember the time, now long ago, when we sat together at sporting events, sharing personal thoughts and glorious moments. Ground records being broken each week indicate more people are going to games but are they relating?





I walked to work with my son the day following a St George v. Parramatta game. Sean is a Dragons' supporter, having been too young to appreciate the Fibro days, and he handed me his mobile when a name came up on his speed dial. I spoke to the guy, a Parramatta supporter who had been at the game. Afterwards, I asked Sean who the guy was and he said, 'Some bloke I met over the phone. I've never actually seen him. We just talk every Monday about how our teams are going. He would have got a buzz out of talking to you.'

All three of us were at the same game but did not connect physically.

When you are at a game with fellow tribesmen, it's like pulling a blanket over your head when you're a kid — suddenly the bad world goes away and nothing outside that little space even exists.

It's a delicious feeling and Wests-Manly games were delicious, even for those being stitched afterwards.

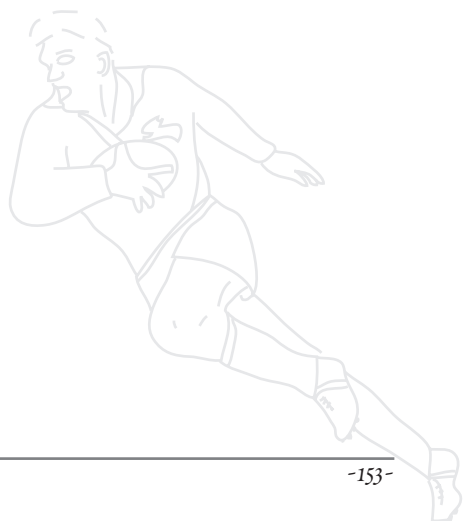
Today, with Wests merged with Balmain, supporters of the joint venture live in terraces, Strathfield mansions, Lidcombe weatherboard and Campbelltown brick veneer. A Manly supporter actually faxed me a map, published in the *SMH* last year, showing more fibro houses on the northern beaches than in the rest of Sydney, with the bilious triumphant scribble, 'Exposed by your own newspaper'.

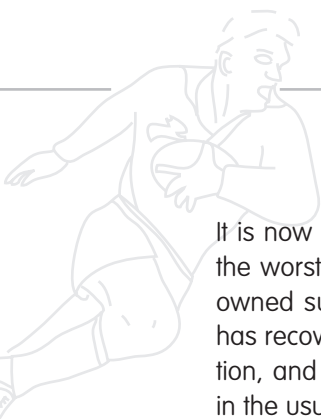
If I were still coaching Wests and Arko came up with that, I'd say all those fibro homes were relics of the 1960s, holiday homes built by wealthy doctors and lawyers who thought they were too good for the decent folk of the western suburbs.

The Stuff of Dreams, or the Dream Stuffed?
Rugby League, Media Empires,
Sex Scandals, and Global Plays

21 September 2006,
NSW Leagues Club, Sydney

David Rowe





It is now over a decade since the Super League War confirmed all the worst fears of those who see contemporary sport as a wholly owned subsidiary of corporate commercial media. Rugby league has recovered on the surface, with a unified League, open competition, and respectable crowds, television ratings, and sponsorships in the usual places. The NRL competition is successful in that it does produce a rapid turnover of winners—it rains reigning premiers, with seven different teams having won since 1998 and no team winning consecutive competitions. League loudly asserts that the house rent in twain in the last century is in good order for the current one. But is such optimism justified?

Despite official pronouncements that the Super League cataclysm is a thing of the past, it continues to stalk the code like Banquo's Ghost at a Macbeth family dinner. The scars of the Murdoch-Packer collision are still visible, a constant reminder that the 'people's game' can be turned upside down if media capital with big ego so decrees. Frequent sexual misconduct scandals have required the code to resort to gender re-education, and financial improprieties around salary caps commend similar courses in business ethics. The iconic South Sydney club has been re-instated to the competition, but on public relations rather than firm legal grounds, and is subject to internecine warfare, with few pre-restoration 'big day out' demonstrators now witnessing their frequent losses before crowds that mostly struggle to make five figures.¹ The 'world game' of (association) football once known as soccer is resurgent, with Frank Lowy as a Packer for the new millennium, a ticket to the 2006 World Cup finals and the Asian Football Confederation, and a shiny new (if ill-advisedly restrictive) pay TV contract. Professionalised rugby union, with abundant cash and impeccable city connections, raids the ranks of League's best players (and sometimes gets them back in shop-worn late career), promising serious international competitions that make a mockery of League's claim to be of much significance beyond eastern Australasia, southwest France, and pockets of northern England somehow missed by

**'The scars of the
Murdoch-
Packer collision are
still visible.'**



Australia World Cup soccer football mad cartoon by Nicholson (courtesy Nicholson of the Australian: www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au).

the football juggernaut. The now genuinely national Australian Rules football, with even less of an international presence than League, successfully brandishes its socialistic draft and massive \$780 million, five-year TV rights contract.²

Rugby league in Australia and a small number of places, then, is alive and kicking, but confronting a diminished place in the hierarchy of Australian sport. It is not so much threatened with extinction as sporting subordination. It may seem perverse to be pessimistic as the season reaches its climax, but before the carnivalesque pleasure of the Grand Final, it is advisable to review the state of the game—and reconsider the gifts bestowed by Super League a decade on. Does its trumpeted dream seek to conceal the recurring nightmare of the permanent wooden spoon among the four football codes? In seeking to answer this question, I'm going to address globalisation, the media, and the sports labour market; the legacy of Super League; issues of gender, and the series of sexual scandals that have consistently besmirched the name of rugby league in recent years.

'It is not so much threatened with extinction as sporting subordination.'

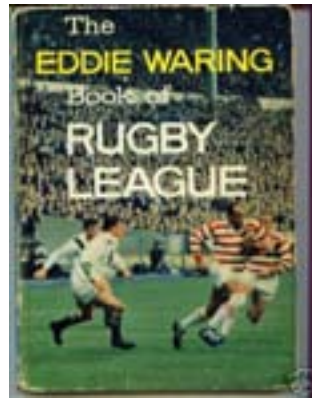


A short rugby league autobiography

I am an unconventional choice to deliver the Tom Brock annual lecture. Previous speakers have been an all-male line up of sports historians, authors, playwrights and journalists, united by their love of League. While not breaking the mould in sex/gender terms, I'm more of an interested observer and ambivalent appreciator of the game than a rusted-on fan. Among the football codes I prefer association football (soccer) and rugby union. I've gone to the odd League game, but I don't regularly attend any sports arena to watch any sport, and I don't even subscribe to pay television. I've been researching and analysing media sports culture, especially in relation to media, for many years, as an almost accidental offshoot of work on popular music and journalism. In my spare moments I'm mostly an armchair spectator, with varied leisure consumption uses for sport—sometimes as premium programming, but often as audio-visual wallpaper. I especially enjoy the unanticipated pleasure of being casually drawn into a screen sports contest in which I have little prior interest, such as an Australian Rules game, caring beyond reason about the outcome, and probably forgetting why by the following morning.

My relationship to rugby league shifts from sharp interest to mild indifference, spikes of partisanship to flashes of irritation and incomprehension. There have been times, though, when I've been as attentive a television spectator of State of Origin and some of the closer Test matches as the best of League supporters, and I have twice found myself going disconcertingly ape in hooning around the streets of Newcastle, my former home town, after Grand Final wins. I'm here, then, as an interested outsider, neither a congenital devotee of the game nor entirely immune to its appeal. Like the television referee asked to adjudicate on a dubious match event, I'll call it as I see it with both sightless eyes, and interrupt the smooth flow of play with seemingly interminable yet somehow deeply flawed decisions. From what I've heard about Tom Brock, he didn't mind a vigorous debate over a

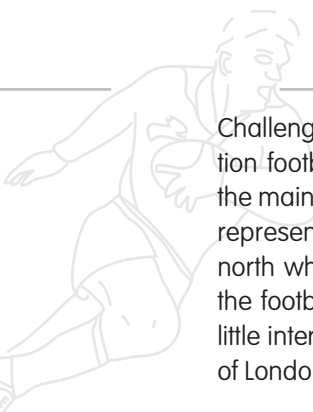
contrary point of view. I'm also told that at the CSIRO he was known to get onto the blower and, in a stentorian voice, inform the person who had answered of the errors they had made. If Tom has access to the Royal Telephone tonight, I'll be expecting his call.



The cover of Eddie Waring's Book of Rugby League.

My earliest memories of rugby league are the grainy black and white television images of the BBC Television's Saturday afternoon *Grandstand* program, compered by the linguistically eccentric Eddie Waring. Rugby league didn't mean much in the south west of England where I grew up. It was a northern game, characterised by big, burly men made almost indistinguishable by mud, bumping into others with similarly impressive beer guts, their seemingly atavistic activities interpreted by Eddie, whose commentary could have benefited from sub-titles for most people born out of earshot of *Coronation Street*. I have learnt from Andrew Moore's inaugural Tom Brock lecture that Eddie Waring briefly graced Australian screens in the 1960s through the ABC's broadcast of British games.³ I also understand that Eddie had a stoush with Brisbane game caller George Lovejoy in 1966.⁴ The mind boggles at how Australians received Eddie's weird commentating style, but according to Andrew he made exquisite play with the name of Arthur Beetson during the latter's stint with Hull Kingston Rovers. It can never happen now, but Eddie and Artie as joint commentators on a Great Britain-Australia Test match would have been something to hear—if not to decipher.

It was many years later that I saw Lindsay Anderson's 1963 film *This Sporting Life*, and although this was British neo-realism rather than Hollywood glitz, the rough-hewn charisma of Richard Harris's Frank Machin had little in common with the specimens of northern English masculinity lionised by Edward Marsden Waring. Even the annual



Challenge Cup Final traditionally held at Wembley, English association football's most sacred site, did little to insert rugby league into the mainstream across the whole nation. The evening news routinely represented it as an affable annual invasion of flat caps from the north who, although seemingly from the same neighbourhoods as the football hooligans of Greater Manchester and Leeds, displayed little interest in threatening and assaulting each other, or the citizens of London and other residents of the 'Soft South'.

Over the years I've watched rugby league in Britain develop from a highly regionalised sport with little in the way of proper international competition and massively dominated by association football. Following its velvet Super League revolution, League in Britain has emerged in the 21st century as a highly regionalised sport with little in the way of proper international competition and massively dominated by association football—but with Murdoch money. This is one of the principal reasons why rugby league must remain a minor sport in global terms—its lack of multi-regional, let alone multi-national appeal.



Bradford Northern v. Hull KR at Odsal Stadium, 23 Mar. 1968 (courtesy of 'The Bradford Bulls Foundation' and the (Bradford) Telegraph and Argus. The Bradford Bulls Foundation is 'funded' by the Heritage Lottery Fund).

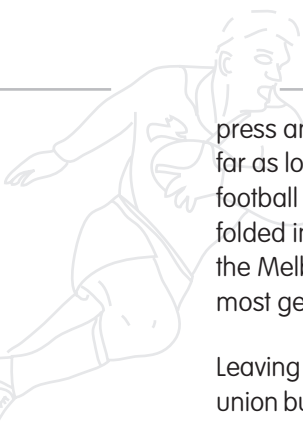
This may not be such a bad thing if its ambitions match its prospects. With the right maintenance and development strategies and no more media—induced carnage, it will remain a sport that draws its strength, and is in equal measure limited by, place and history.⁵ Super League headquarters in the UK has just announced that average weekly crowd attendances this season were the best in the 11 years of the competition, and had risen for a fifth successive season to a new high of 9026.⁶ An encouraging set of numbers, perhaps, but further confirmation of the position of League in the British sport firmament.

'It will remain a sport that draws its strength, and is in equal measure limited by, place and history.'

In moving over two decades ago to New South Wales after a brief residency in Tasmania, I was impressed with the deep roots that rugby league had sunk on the eastern seaboard of Australia. But even here, my destination of Wagga Wagga was clearly border territory, with a strong Australian Rules football affiliation (who could forget the Ganmain-Grong Grong-Matong club?) and, at grass roots level at least, a penchant for association football. Next stop Newcastle was much more promising rugby league territory, but this history was curiously fractured by local disagreements over participation in a Sydney-run competition. When the Knights won the Super League-split ARL Grand Final in 1997 (with the local Super League franchise, the Hunter Mariners, runners up in the World Club Challenge just three weeks later), those caught in the moment with short memories made much of that team's 'tradition' and 'heritage', which might have stretched back to 1908–9 were it not

'When the Knights won the Super League-split ARL Grand Final in 1997 ... those caught in the moment with short memories made much of that team's "tradition" and "heritage".'

for the inconvenient eight-decade long hiatus in regular competition outside the Hunter Region.⁷ This supporter of Plymouth Argyle Football Club, founded in 1886, was amusingly bewildered that he'd lived within walking distance of the International Sports Centre (later Marathon and now EnergyAustralia Stadium) for two years before the venerable Newcastle Knights ever took to the pitch there. The Knights did it again in 2001, and this time it wasn't necessary to sup-



press any loose, disloyal talk of winning a weakened competition. As far as local sports teams went, though, the late lamented association football team Newcastle KB United, which was formed in 1977 and folded in 1984 after winning a national knockout competition against the Melbourne Knights in Melbourne, might still lay claim to the city's most genuine national football code success.

Leaving 'Joey' Johns (the much-lauded player once courted by rugby union but seemingly bonded to league through Channel Nine⁸) behind in Newcastle this year has taken me into new rugby league zones—a home on the border of Souths and 'Tiger country', an office closer to the Parramatta Eels, and regular traversal of the Greater Western Sydney Region, encompassing Canterbury and Penrith, and the Tigers' 'other half' who were once Western Suburbs. Most people I meet have a League team that they care about, but if the 'water cooler' test is a reliable scientific instrument, then League has in 2006 been somewhat obscured in conversational space by other forms of sport, especially of an international nature. This year, the British Empire (now Commonwealth) Games and the FIFA World Cup have hogged the sport talk turf, and even the Tour de France (otherwise known as the Tour de Farce)—for me a blandly scenic late night holiday program marred by men in aesthetically disturbing costumes on permanent suspicion of artificially induced hormonal imbalances—has sometimes consigned League to the chasing chat pack.

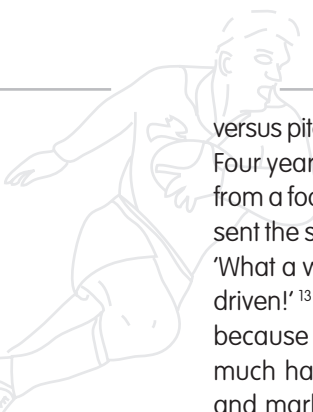
'League has in 2006 been somewhat obscured ... by other forms of sport.'

But sports competitions, like all long-form narratives, have their moments of light and shade, quiet passages and moving endings. The 'sudden death' element of finals series matches, and the pageantry of the Grand Final itself, provide the requisite (melo)drama. Rivalries old and new, lavishly primed with media imagery and 'sportuguese', come to the surface at such times as they re-assert the importance of the partisan and the local. Parochialism is a crucial pre-requisite for the continuing success of sport, but it is of itself not enough to secure its place in the pantheon. If capital, culture, media, technology, athletic labour power and audiences are international, and subject to the massification of global spectacle,⁹ where does this leave a sport, like rugby league, that in a hundred years has found it difficult not only to cross national boundaries, but even state lines?

Global appeal

The scale of the problem for any rugby league imperialists wishing to establish it as a major international sport is striking if the 2003 Rugby World Cup in Australia or the 2006 World Cup of association football in Germany is compared with the fiasco of the last rugby league World Cup in 2000, with its often indifferent crowds, frequently uneven matches, and over-stretched inclusion of such international League powers as Russia, Lebanon, and the Cook Islands. The 13th World Cup, to be held in Australia in 2008 and marking the centenary of the game in the southern hemisphere, must certainly pale by comparison with these events, and even leading annual individual international sports tournaments like the Australian Open Tennis Championships. League is seemingly caught between its internationalist aspirations and the sporting socialism in one country position of Australian Rules football (the annual International Rules encounter with Ireland offering only an eccentric diversion). Super League was supposed to fix this problem, claiming, in its epic rhetorical tussle with the Australian Rugby League, that its grand 'global vision' was to use the media apparatus of News Corporation and the umbrella arrangements with Britain and France to make League a leading international sport rather than what News saw as an antipodean backwater presided over by its myopic administrators and big-fish-in-a-small-national-pond media proprietor, the late Kerry Packer.¹⁰

Murdoch and Packer did come to their rapprochement after the expensive, ego-laden Super League dispute, but as in all wars the cost of reconstruction has been high.¹¹ The last ten years have involved healing wounds and rebuilding trust with clubs and fans. If it is believed that I am over-emphasising the damaging legacy of Super League, then I can turn for support to last year's Tom Brock lecturer, Roy Masters, a dyed-in-the-wool League man who is no friend of academics who write critically about sport. According to Masters 'Confrontation lies at the essence of sport, even cricket. Batter v. bowler, or in baseball, batter



versus pitcher. For some, rugby league is still ARL versus Super League.’¹² Four years earlier, Alex Buzo, a man who could anticipate a tautology from a footy commentator’s mouth before the speaker’s brain had even sent the signal to it, and who sadly died in August this year, exclaimed ‘What a wedge those hectic days of the 1995 pay-television war have driven!’¹³ The problem in all sport is that cleavages are easily created because fans are by definition immoderate. Patient bridge building is much harder, and soothing technocratic talk of ‘strategic synergies’ and marketing clichés about ‘going forward’ likely to be resisted, as any Newtown Jets fan will attest.

At the height of the Super League war, I recall attending a ‘Stop Murdoch Committee’ campaign rally organised by ‘Aussies for the ARL’ in the main auditorium of what was then the Newcastle Workers Club (now called, with considerable historical irony, Newcastle Panthers, and

part of the Panthers World at the heart of which is former Super League club the Penrith Panthers). Large screens carried images of Kerry Packer, as the noble media baron with the interests of the game at heart, and of Rupert Mur-

‘Kerry was cheered and Rupert booed and hissed in true Christmas pantomime style, and only a foolhardy dissenter would have seized the microphone and declaimed “a pox on both their houses!”’

doch as the malevolently Machiavellian manipulator interested only in turning a buck at any cost. Kerry was cheered and Rupert booed and hissed in true Christmas pantomime style, and only a foolhardy dissenter would have seized the microphone and declaimed ‘a pox on both their houses!’ But the House of Packer did sell out the ARL (few if any of Packer Senior’s obituarists who routinely celebrated his contribution to cricket extended their praise to his role in League), and Murdoch secured a major stake in the Australian game. The confused foot soldiers of ‘Aussies for the ARL’ must have wondered why their generals had used them as cannon fodder only to make a dishonourable, balance sheet shaped peace settlement.

The passions aroused by Super League cannot be doused by Prozac and incantations of ‘putting it all behind us’. It is still hard to repress the recurrent images of the sons of sons of media moguls barnstorming the country, signing up everything in shoulder pads; of clubs opened,

merged, shut down, ejected and re-instated; of lawyers picking over the entrails of the 'Working Man's Game'. The NRL has emphasised League's heritage in its short life as a classic rhetorical move seeking to obscure the defeat of the more traditional, perhaps reactionary elements of the game at the hands of the modernisers from News Corporation. League may have become anachronistic at the end of the last century, not only in its meat pie ethos (if Reg Reagan is funny at all—a comic taste I seem mercifully doomed not to acquire—it is only because parody requires the prior recognition of its object) but also, as I'll discuss later, because of its gender politics.¹⁴ Another Tom Brock lecturer, Thomas Keneally, remarked in his address that:

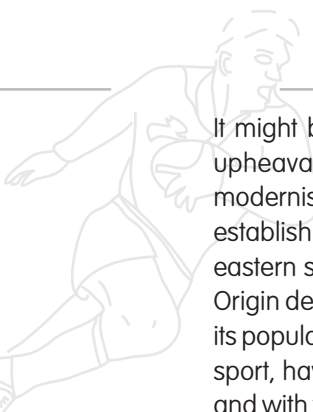
I believe rugby league has too little a sense of its history, and too little appreciation of the struggle people have made to play it.¹⁵

Tom might have added references to the struggles of men and women to sustain it at various levels with voluntary labour, and of supporters and spectators to watch it in the stadium, club, pub and home. These stories of everyday politics make up the history of rugby league, and the airbrushed historical portraits that tend to be offered from within the formal organisations of the game (see, for example, the 'History of Rugby League' section of the NRL website)¹⁶ are more about soothing amnesia than the integrity of the historical record.

'The notion stubbornly persists that the people's hold on the game is tenuous, and that, should the next media giant stir, a newly invented tradition will flow.'

Some of the 'battlers' have now morphed into Howard-voting

'aspirational', and battalions of cosmopolitans, bohemians and metrosexuals have begun to gentrify the meaner streets of inner-city League territory. In other words, heroic celebrations of League's proletariat are beginning to take on the status of unreliable memoirs. When histories of rugby league are told, they must be of the warts-and-all variety, the sepia tones of nostalgia offset by the stark resolution of auto-critical analysis. But in the calculus of loss and gain from this period of turmoil in the game, the notion stubbornly persists that the people's hold on it is tenuous, and that, should the next media giant stir, a newly invented tradition will flow from the first press release.



It might be countered that we should not be too squeamish about upheavals and change, and that Super League achieved a rapid modernisation of an anachronistic game that justified its pain through establishing long-term viability. League still means a good deal on the eastern seaboard of Australia (and parts of Oceania), as the State of Origin decider 2.4 million viewer peak on 5 July 2006 reveals, as does its popularity among sports on pay television. But it is not yet a national sport, having failed to establish itself in Western and South Australia, and with the Melbourne Storm still resembling West Berlin surrounded by the Rules bloc. Indeed, the last decade represents something of a retrenchment and retreat from League's forays into central and western regions. Neither has the process of consolidation been a stunning success. Take, for example, round 22 of the NRL in early August 2006, chosen only because it coincided with the writing of this section of the paper. In its seven matches the aggregate crowd figure was less than 100,000 (97,341), with average ground attendance of less than 14,000 (13,906). In the same weekend, by contrast, round 18 of the Australian Football League saw almost 250,000 spectators (249,639) attend its eight matches, an average ground attendance of over 30,000 (31,205). Perhaps, as the Super League proponents claim, the game has been saved from going down the plug hole. It is clear, though, that its jacuzzi is not exactly overflowing, and that it remains vulnerable to rival codes with a superior national and international reach.



An image of a poster used in the 'Save the Game Rally' (courtesy www.southsydneyrabbithohs.bravepages.com/save-the-game.htm).

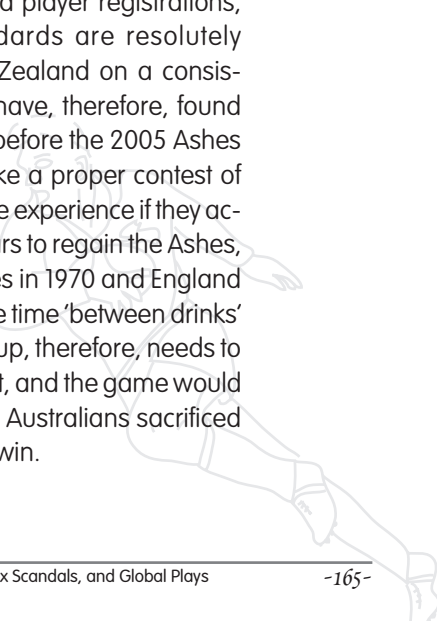
Just as News Corporation was trying to vacuum up rugby league, it acquired the rights to the SANZAR competition in rugby union, which then commanded the capital to perpetrate the disruptive raids on League's playing ranks that League once made on it during the days of gentlemanly amateurism and perfidious shamateurism. At the same time, rugby league players and their agents began to use the cross-code rugby labour market to broker better deals for themselves by threatening to switch unless they got more money and a personal television contract. The Super League War had pushed up players' wages to unprecedented levels, with old stagers close to retirement suddenly becoming saleable again, their last pay days making them looking a little like fading pop stars on farewell tours.

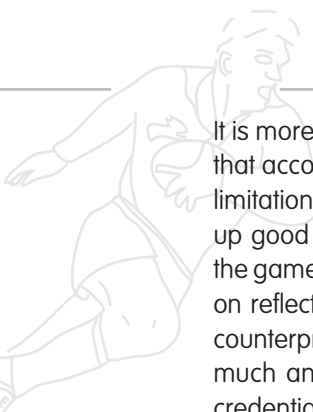
But as financial discipline and a more rigorously enforced salary cap were restored, and with fewer clubs providing good paid work places,

'The Super League War had pushed up players' wages to unprecedented levels, with old stagers close to retirement suddenly becoming saleable again, their last pay days making them looking a little like fading pop stars on farewell tours.'

coaches and 'seasoned' players found Britain, with its Super League funds in strong pounds sterling and a weaker competition, attractive once more. This might have been good news for rugby league if it had led to a resurgence of the northern hemisphere game, but, despite increased player registrations, its standards are resolutely

refusing to match that of Australia and New Zealand on a consistent basis. Australian rugby league followers have, therefore, found themselves in a similar position to cricket fans before the 2005 Ashes tour, secretly hoping that the Poms would make a proper contest of it—though they would no doubt similarly hate the experience if they actually lost. It took the England cricket team 19 years to regain the Ashes, but Great Britain last won a League Ashes series in 1970 and England the League World Cup in 1972—almost twice the time 'between drinks' in both cases. The 2008 Rugby League World Cup, therefore, needs to manufacture more than a trans-Tasman contest, and the game would benefit from—unpalatable though it may be to Australians sacrificed for the greater good—a northern hemisphere win.





It is more likely, though, that the inevitable efflorescence of patriotism that accompanies any international sports event will not disguise the limitations of the Rugby League World Cup. Its main matches will pick up good crowds and audiences in various places, and it will make the game seem more cosmopolitan. But the League 'world' will surely on reflection look small and idiosyncratic, and so the event may be counterproductive in gifting ammunition to rival sports (including pretty much anything played at the Olympics) with stronger international credentials.

Contemporary sport involves a lot of hard, unglamorous work to operate successfully (by any measure) in an environment where leisure and exercise provision offers myriad competing claims on time, energy and income. The sports labour market is a complex, shifting entity that is much larger than its playing contingent—it includes administrators, trainers, journalists, marketers, advertisers, educators and fans, the latter performing much of the unpaid emotional work that melds a series of disparate functions into a sport. Keeping the machine going, season after season, requires a popular fan base and constant renewal, meaning that the management of image is crucial—a quick cultural turn can make a soberly traditional sport seem ludicrous, or a rising new one mere hype-driven faddism.¹⁷ Sporting traditions must be re-invented, and reputations defended. For this reason, sports hate scandal. Why, then, have rugby league and scandal become so consistently coupled in Australia in the 21st century?

'Keeping the machine going, season after season, requires a popular fan base and constant renewal, meaning that the management of image is crucial.'

Seasons of scandal

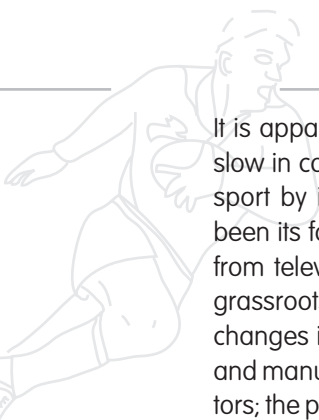
Every year, in a dispiritingly predictable ritual, I receive calls from newspaper opinion page editors and talkback radio producers to comment on the latest scandal involving the misconduct of sportsmen. Alleged sexual harassment and assault, drunkenness, racist and homophobic sledging, ingestion of performance-enhancing and illegal ‘social’

‘League in Australia has in recent years gained more media coverage for all the wrong reasons than any other code.’

drugs, and sundry other crimes and misdemeanours by high-profile professional sportsmen, generate frenzied media interest well beyond the sports pages and news bulletins.¹⁸ Sportsmen are not the only social and occupa-

tional group who engage in such behaviour (although there is some evidence, mostly in the USA, that athletes are over-represented in legal cases involving sexual assault),¹⁹ and among the ranks of professional athletes rugby league players by no means have a monopoly on it.²⁰ But it is fair to say that League in Australia has in recent years gained more media coverage for all the wrong reasons than any other code.

We now enter into dangerous territory, because the intensity of media coverage is related to prior assumptions and conventions of newsworthiness as much as to the seriousness of the matter. Prominent sportsmen are by definition news,²¹ although it is not only high-profile groups who may be linked to patterns of transgression—witness, for example, the ways in which ethnicity and religion were linked in the press to the Sydney pack rape court cases of recent years.²² It is also easy for social class prejudices to be rehearsed in such debates, the working-class masculinity celebrated in League lore, and in every single previous Tom Brock lecture to date,²³ turned against itself as signifying a brutish propensity for sexual violence and reactionary gender values.



It is apparent, though, that rugby league as an institution has been slow in coming to terms with the demands placed on contemporary sport by its affluence and visibility. Part of the game's charm has been its folksiness,²⁴ but the more money that has come washing in from television, the greater the distance between local heroes and grassroots fans. The fan base has not been static either, with major changes in social and working lives, not least the decline of manual and manufacturing labour; the rise of the service and information sectors; the progressive integration of women into the full-time workforce, and the increased provision of, and demand for, tertiary education. There has, then, been a limited 'bourgeoisification' and 'feminisation' of contemporary sport, not least because these processes open up rich new revenue streams for it.

League has been unsettled by these developments. Its larrikinism runs deep, and so is resistant to the concerns of the disparaged 'trendies' and 'pseuds' (among whom I am sure to be counted by some) who want to talk about racism, sexism, homophobia and other serious subjects concerned with equity and power. In this denial they have been aided and abetted by most sports journalists, whose visceral loathing of social critics of sport is matched only by their passionate identification (sometimes to the point of idolatry) with the objects of their gaze. Just as domestic violence used to be regarded as the dirty secret of individual households, League clubs have tended to keep things in-house. The dynamics of these homo-social organisations emphasise solidarity and in-group norms. Mateship is a much celebrated value within Australian culture, but its proponents rarely recognise that it both excludes and includes; panders to the division of the nation into sex and gender-based camps, and can be used to excuse and cover up some very unsavoury behaviour, including alcohol-fuelled violence to non-consensual sex.²⁵ The space between mateship and criminal collusion can be marked by little more than another round of bourbon and a stubborn, fabricated failure of memory.

'The space between mateship and criminal collusion can be marked by little more than another round of bourbon and a stubborn, fabricated failure of memory.'

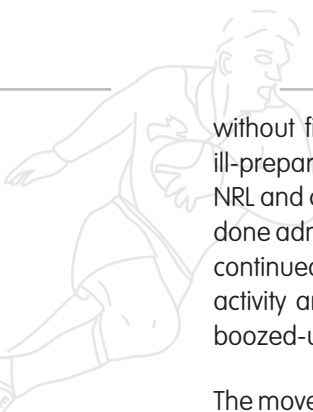
It used to be easier when things ‘got out of hand’—a quiet word, token or more substantial compensation, and the profound deterrence of a ‘she said, they said’ criminal trial with a beyond reasonable doubt burden of proof and a residual blame-the-victim strain of public sentiment. But just as the commercial development of sport and its consequent financial rewards dispensed with the need for second jobs for League administrators and players, it also meant more surveillance and expectation regarding attitudes and behaviour. For some time the penny didn’t seem to drop that the cost of greater adulation and multiples of the average weekly wage was a micro-cultural change within sport demanding more mental, physical and political discipline in exchange.²⁶ But it was something of a one-way trade for a while, and when things went wrong the specialist sports press preferred to cultivate its sources and stay on the drip feed than go for the front-page scoop that would queer the pitch for future ‘exclusives’.²⁷

Sport, though, spread out well beyond the back page and the just-before-the-weather segment of broadcast news bulletins in the formation of what I call the ‘media sports cultural complex’,²⁸ and in the process the clannish relationship between sports and media organisations

‘The cost of greater adulation and multiples of the average weekly wage was a micro-cultural change within sport demanding more mental, physical and political discipline in exchange.’

began to break down. Certainly, they had a lot more to do with each other than in earlier epochs, and the former were happy to accept handsome broadcast rights money and the profile that went with it in exchange for

greater media power over sport. But the media are much more than their sports wing, and the forces that took sport beyond it created common property and fair game.²⁹ Enormous cultural visibility, rich rewards, powerful fan passions and media hunger for copy inevitably bring the searchlight into sport’s hidden places. Sponsors needed to look after the integrity of their brands in an era of assiduous image manufacture and maintenance, and governments at all levels demanded accountability regarding their grants and subsidies. This means that negative headlines can be instantly produced, allegations made, suspicions canvassed and judgements pronounced in continuous, rolling news cycles. Presumptions of innocence can be set aside and ‘no smoke



without fire' suspicions held. League, more than most sports, was ill-prepared for this new media-saturated environment. Although the NRL and clubs like Souths, Penrith and Parramatta have for some time done admirable community work, there has been a considerable and continued disconnection between this kind of grounded, pro-social activity and the arrogant and sometimes dangerous excesses of a boozed-up team on the razz.

The moves taken by NRL Chief Executive David Gallop (himself a rather atypical rugby league figure in terms of masculine self-presentation) to counter the problem, including a \$1million investment in gender research and education programs recommended in the *Playing By*

The Rules: On And Off The

Field report produced just

before Christmas 2004,³⁰

are laudable. But how

deeply has the message

permeated rugby league

culture? If the official NRL

website is any guide, not

much at all. A search of this key interface of League and the wider

world in the week of this lecture provided no results at all for the report,

its authors, the Education and Welfare Committee, or gender politics

education. The previous public pronouncements of the Canterbury

Bulldogs' Malcolm Noad and Steve Folkes, and the bad behaviour of the

Newcastle Knights within weeks of the release of *Playing By The Rules*

and the introduction of workshops for young players about managing

encounters with women, have not been promising indicators of cultural

change in the game. The unfolding program to educate players about

their social and sexual conduct, promote responsible consumption of

alcohol, and to involve clubs in the improvement of the position and

treatment of women in rugby league, may produce beneficial results.

But Groundhog Day tales of boozing and allegations of assault suggest

that substantial elements of League are still to realise, fully, that the old

days have gone—and, in this respect, good riddance.

'Moves taken to counter the problem are laudable but how deeply has the message permeated rugby league culture? ... Substantial elements of League are still to realise, fully, that the old days have gone.'

Conclusions

My overall argument, clearly, is that rugby league is the most vulnerable of the football codes in Australia, and the one with the slightest prospects for future prosperity. The professionalisation of rugby union, the belated rise of association football, and the enduring appeal of Australian Rules football are pressures from without. The unedifying legacy of Super League, and recurring sexual violence and club financial scandals, are disintegrating factors from within. Yet, if League's medium-to-long-term prospects are not bright, they are not condemned to darkness. But what can a League for the 21st century look like? Its 'project' is somewhat contradictory. It must take from its past the best of its working-class heritage, the cohesiveness that makes playing for and supporting a team meaningful. Yet some of this baggage must be jettisoned, not least the unreconstructed attitudes to gender and sexuality that speak of a time when male class solidarity could hide a multitude of other oppressions.³¹

The NRL has played to its traditions through its 'that's/what's my team/dream?' retro campaigns, but these have been compromised somewhat by the still-fresh memory of media mogul disruptions that jeopardised the sense of place and collective identity on which all sports rely. Sports history has to be carefully handled and it is easy for feet to be tangled. Association football's new de-ethnicised, city-based A-League is on the up from a low base, but its attempted erasure of the memory of the deep contribution of ethnically-based groups to the sport in Australia smacks more than a little of historical denial.³² Successful though the 2006 World Cup finals in Germany no doubt were for advancing the game in Australia, the exclusive seven-year television deal with Foxtel is hardly conducive to the building of the broad popular foundation it demonstrably needs. The same can be said of rugby union's Super 14 competition which, like the sport in Australia more generally, seems to be forgetting that sport is above all a form of



popular culture. League's combined free-to-air and pay TV presence is, then, still a big advantage in a sports world where ready visibility confers major benefits.

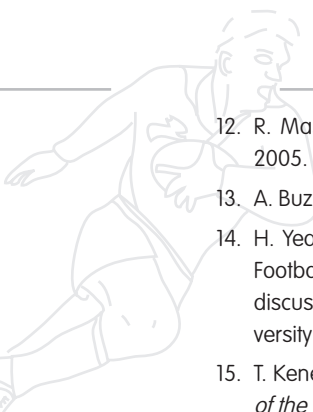
Rugby league does have the kind of deep history³³ that is a platform for survival in a crowded sports market—the case of basketball in 1990s Australia is a salient instance of how fashionability and cultural buzz can provide a misleading sense of unstoppable momentum. League is expanding again within its zonal limits on the Gold Coast, and its toehold in Melbourne is secure for the moment. The openness of the NRL competition, despite the relatively small number of professional clubs, compares favourably with larger and more glamorous competitions, such as English Premier League football, where the lack of a salary cap enables Russian resource billionaires and American stock market raiders to buy success. The Super League fantasy of globalising the game can be safely discarded, but rugby league at least does have some international presence. The Australian specificity of Rules is both gift and curse. It is the truly unique Australian game—and so must remain in a home girt by sea.

'It is the truly unique Australian game—and so must remain in a home girt by sea.'

I began this lecture with some gloomy reflections on League, but at the other end things look a little more hopeful. It is difficult to be too pessimistic in such a place and time—League HQ a short walk from Sydney Harbour, with the season's apogee and the summer beckoning. Much of what I have talked about—the jostling for position in the sport and media markets; the re-drawing of histories and loyalties; the corporate manoeuvres and shenanigans; the perilous position of young women in the twilight hours surrounded by a pack of drunken footballers—might already have begun to recede from view. If sport is a 'prison of measured time',³⁴ we are all prone to be frozen in the moment. But time is the eternal escapee, and future historians of sport will judge at leisure the analytical stake claimed here in crossing the open ground towards the high fence and the razor wire, urged on by the receding cries of imagined commentators.

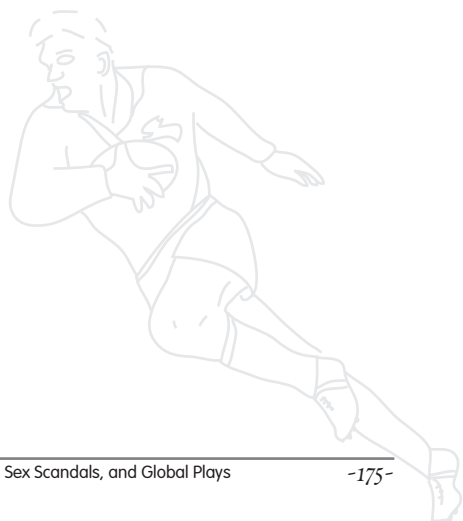
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1. However, the 'celebrity capital' takeover in March 2006 of Russell Crowe and Peter Holmes a Court has prompted, if not a reversal of fortune, at least an improved outlook.
2. The dynamic environment of the 'media sports cultural complex' can produce sudden twists and turns, though, such as renewed in-fighting in rugby and a spate of footballers behaving badly stories in Rules.
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4. G. Mallory, 'George Lovejoy Obituary', February 2003, *RL1908* <http://rl1908.com/Rugby-League-News/George-Lovejoy.htm> (accessed 20 Sept. 2006).
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6. Super League, 'Engage Super League XI Sets Attendance Record', 18 Sept. 2006, <http://www.superleague.co.uk/news/3938> (accessed 19 Sept. 2006).
7. D. Rowe and P. McGuirk, "'[D]runk for Three Weeks": Sporting Success and City Image', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 34, no. 2, 1999, pp. 125–41.
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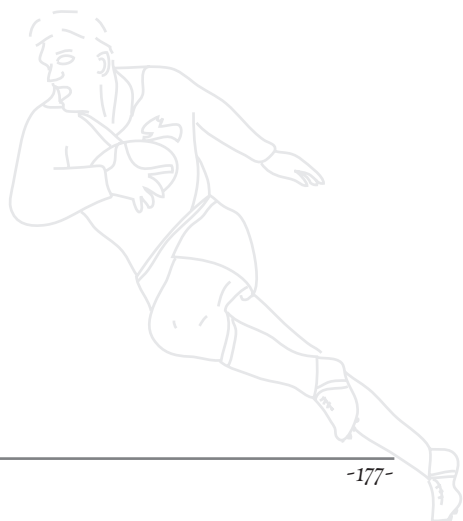


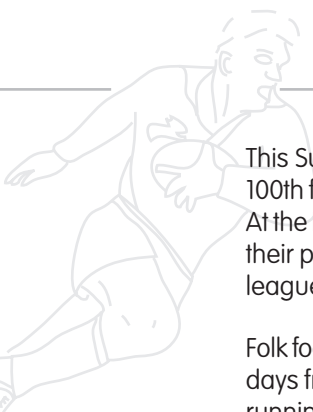


**'Nothing but a Nine-Day Wonder':
The Founding of Rugby League –
Australia's First Professional Code**

27 September 2007,
NSW Leagues Club, Sydney

Sean Fagan





This Sunday will bring the curtain down on Australian rugby league's 100th footballing-winter, the first having been played in Sydney in 1908. At the NRL Grand Final a crowd of more than 80,000 will no doubt voice their plentiful, colourful and forthright opinions from the stands. Rugby league is this city's football game of the people.

Folk football was played at community festivals in Sydney on public holidays from at least the 1820s. It was a mixture of handling, kicking and running football. By the 1880s, with rugby the preferred codified form of football in the colony, Moore Park became the stage that attracted the multitudes of this city. (It now is that area where cars are parked at the Football Stadium). With little difference to the mood of today's league fans, the surging, and yelling crowds would border along the touchlines, and as one account put it, it was 'as though the battle were one of fisticuffs instead of a friendly game of football'.



NSW All Blues and NZ All Golds, Sydney Agricultural (Show) Ground, 17 Aug. 1907.

By the late 1890s the working class had moved into Sydney rugby union in vast numbers, as players and supporters. With a practical and simple sentiment of Sydneysiders that winning is all that matters, rugby union, a slave to its principles of amateurism, was never going to survive as this city's favoured football code. Professional soccer had already erupted in the large cities of England, rugby union was increasingly in dispute in Yorkshire and Lancashire over professionalism, and when the conditions were right in Sydney—a professional football code would come forth here too. It was never a question of if, but when.

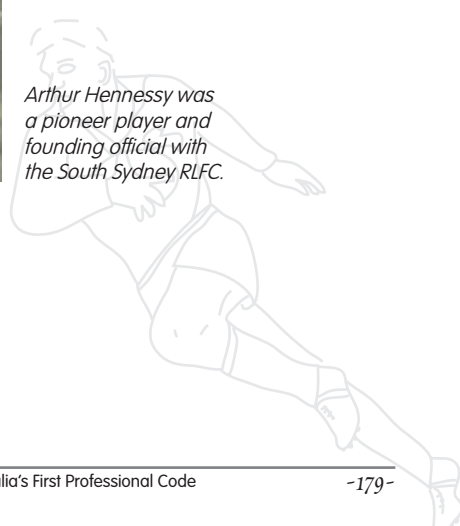
The 13-Man Game

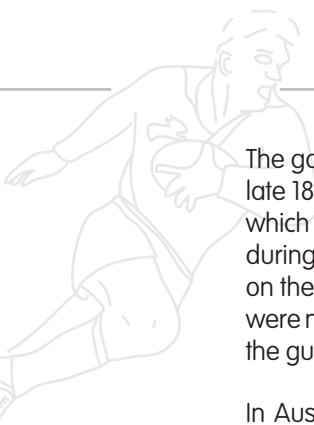
One hundred years ago this Sunday, the New Zealand All Blacks and Dally Messenger arrived in England. At the same time preliminary meetings had begun in the districts of Sydney to form rugby league clubs. One such meeting took place at the house of Arthur Hennessy—a man who it is claimed called rugby league 'a game for racehorses' after his first reading of the rule book.



Arthur Hennessy was a pioneer player and founding official with the South Sydney RLFC.

Arthur Hennessy stated in 1908 that rugby league is 'a game for racehorses'.





The game from Rugby School had gained worldwide popularity by the late 1850s on the back of *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, a best-selling book which described life at Rugby School including a football match. Matches during the 1860s were played with rules agreed upon by the captains on the day and were a mix of handling and non-handling rules. There were no such creations as referees or umpires, with 'playing the honour' the guiding principle—not that it stopped every argument.

In Australia's largest city at that time, Melbourne, the Melbourne FC was formed in 1859 by rival public school men, who, finding that neither party was strong enough to form a club of its own, compromised by adopting rugby rules with two amendments, one of which was the deletion of the off-side restrictions of rugby. Though the AFL will claim next year as the 150th anniversary of Australian Rules, the first uniquely Australian rule—bouncing the ball after running five to six yards—and a collective group of clubs adopting uniform rules, were only adopted in 1866.

The first reports of organised football matches (as opposed to folk football) in Sydney appear in 1865 and 1866, with teams of 20-a-side from the Sydney Football Club, the Australian Cricket Club, the University of Sydney, and loosely collected 'scratch' sides.

By 1874 Sydney had 17 clubs, and disagreements over playing rules were a constant source of bickering and dispute. Following the example of the formation of the RFU in England (1871), 10 of Sydney's clubs came together in 1874 as the NSWRU (initially called the Southern Rugby Football Union).

The prime movers towards the formation of the Union were the Arnold brothers, Richard and Monty, founders of the Wallaroos FC in 1870. The Union (that is, the member clubs) resolved that they would all adhere to playing rugby football solely according to the RFU's laws, and only play matches against each other.

The NSWRU came under immense pressure in the early 1880s to adopt local rules, with the primary target being the elimination of the scrum. Votes at the NSWRU to outlaw the scrum came within a whisker of passing, and it was only because of the heavy influence of the Arnold brothers, and their continued desire to hold true to the playing laws of the RFU that made the difference.



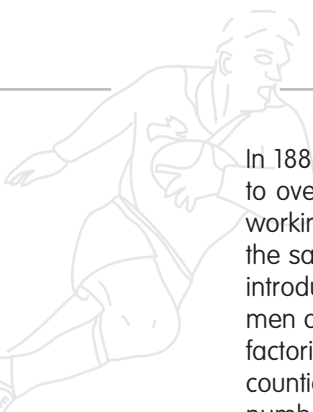
*Wallaroos RFC
c.1899.*

Rugby developed a strong hold in Sydney, and despite the voices calling for reform, the NSWRU remained in control. There was no attempt to overthrow the NSWRU from within, and Australian Rules and soccer did not have enough support to be serious competitors. Soccer may have been able to grow, but the reluctance of the professional FA clubs in England to waste time on an unprofitable tour of Australia arguably cost the code its chance to gain the ascendancy.

By the late 1890s, particularly following tours from the New Zealand and Great Britain teams, along with the introduction of the Saturday half-day holiday, working-class men had moved into rugby union in great numbers as players and supporters. Club matches though were still being organised by invitations between clubs, with the premiership, awarded by a consensus as to which club had achieved the best results against the best clubs—similar to how college football in the USA still determines which two colleges get to play in the end-of-season Rose Bowl. Such gentlemanly arrangements though could not last in a city where ‘winning is everything’, and it was replaced by the mid-1890s with a ‘league structure’ taken from English soccer and American baseball.

The best players all found their way to the top clubs, and play became competitive and ‘win at all costs’. Premiership winners received silver cups and gold medals (the latter were subsequently often melted down and exchanged for cash)—all indicators of semi-professionalism.

In the rugby world such spirit, practices and a league structure only existed in one other place—in England, in Yorkshire.



In 1886, the RFU in England, feared that professionalism was about to overtake rugby, and with that, the RFU's leaders feared that the working-class masses would consume the code and take control in the same way that they had overrun the soccer code. The RFU thus introduced rules against professionalism. The office worker or young men of the gentry were no hope against footballers who were from factories, mines and farms—if the working-class men of the northern counties could recover lost wages or earn money at rugby, their playing numbers would rapidly swamp the gentlemen footballers of London and the south. Ultimately, this led to the formation of rugby league, the Northern Rugby Football Union (Northern Union), in August 1895.

The split was far from unknown in the colonies. The NSWRU, NZRU and QRU all sent letters of support to the RFU in its fight against the outbreak of the professionals and the formation of the NU. There was an acute understanding of the issues by the Sydney rugby community. The touring British captain the Reverend Matthew Mullineux remonstrated at a dinner given in the team's honour in 1899 when he took the opportunity to point out to all that every element of professional rugby existed in Sydney, the only thing missing was the outright paying of footballers (something a Sydney newspaper confirmed as true a few days later anyway!). Mullineux pointed out that the playing laws of rugby only worked if the game was played by men with honour—referees and the rule book could be successfully manipulated by players who were hell-bent on gaining advantages by such means, instead of playing the game in the spirit in which it was intended. The Sydney football commu-

nity would have none of it, with the NSWRU officials telling Mullineux to mind his own business, and if he wanted to start a crusade, he ought to begin with Yorkshire first, rather than Sydney.



The 1899 British RU team was captained by the Rev. Matthew Mullineux (seated, holding the football).

Despite the NSWRU's disregard for Mullineux's opinion, it did recognise that the growing number of working-class footballers and supporters would lead to trouble, with a very real threat that the NSWRU would be overthrown from within and the tie to the RFU would be severed, allowing payments and on-field rules for Australian conditions.

In 1899 the Sydney club had been formed entirely by working-class men, led by future Kangaroo Bill Hardcastle. This was a portent of what was to come. In an attempt to counter this threat, the NSWRU created the Metropolitan Rugby Union (MRU) to control Sydney football. It closed down all the private clubs, replacing them with a district club scheme (based on residential rules) in 1900.

The city was divided into residential zones: Balmain, Norths, Souths, Easts, Wests, Glebe, Newtown, together with the Sydney University (which many objected to as it had no residential basis). The scheme was a compromise, it brought down the gentlemen's clubs and their cliques, gave the working-class players a voice at club and MRU level, and every opportunity to play first grade, but it also prevented them gaining outright control of a club, the MRU and ultimately the NSWRU. In reality, the clubs weren't clubs at all—they were more like representative bodies for their allocated division of the city. They had no autonomy.

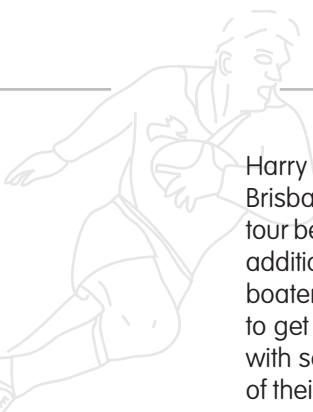
'Why, as to the matter of paying players, we all know that Yorkshire and Lancashire players are paid.' Monty Arnold, NSWRU president and 'the father of Australian rugby'.

Ultimately, while the scheme was democratic and well intended, it failed. The creation of the MRU meant that the NSWRU controlled NSW and Australian matches. It was at this level where all the gate receipts came into the game.

The newly-formed district clubs had insufficient funds, while the NSWRU's accounts accumulated revenue from representative matches. Over the next six years, player and club dissatisfaction grew.

In 1902, with threats by some players to start up a rival body tied to the NU in England, the MRU granted compensation to players for injuries, something allowed by the RFU.

At the inter-state level though, trouble had been brewing since the late 1890s over the miserly three shillings per day travelling allowance.



Harry 'Seven-Heads' Hammill, a member of the 1905 NSW team in Brisbane, stated that the players had to carry their own bank when on tour because, obviously, they were not earning money from their job. In addition, the NSWRU required each of them to pay for their NSW blazer, boater hat, the state's official hat-band, and pre-tour visit to the doctor to get a medical clearance. Those who couldn't fund it at all, had to, with some embarrassment, decline to play for NSW, simply because of their standing in life.

If caught in a shout at a pub, the 3s a day allowance, if they hadn't already spent it, was not enough to cover their obligations of a man. 'Man can't take a shout if ain't got the means to reciprocate if he wants to remain a man.'



NSW rugby union players in the early 1900s were given an allowance of three shillings per day by the NSWRU.



AN AWFUL THREAT.
The Colon (stragg): "The moment you ask for more than three shillings a day we will declare you a professional!"

A cartoon from the Sydney Sportsman, August 1907. The NSWRU and MRU confirmed that anything more than 3s per day allowance was 'an act of professionalism' under the laws of England's RFU.

While some NSW players ‘put the acid’ on the NSWRU by refusing to tour unless they were secretly paid, the NSWRU only accommodated this when there wasn’t an alternative player available who wouldn’t ask for more than his standard three ‘bob’. Others, like Dally Messenger, refused to go down this path anyway, calling it demeaning. He later stated that he could never stomach the ‘paid amateur’. Messenger questioned why he should skulk about in secret merely to satisfy the public face of the NSWRU.

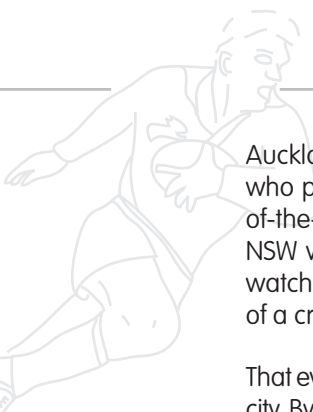
Professionalism in Australian sport had existed from as early as the 1840s, and by the late 1800s was rife in boxing, rowing, cricket, cycling and tennis. Australia’s first cricket teams to England were all organised by the leading cricketers and their backers. Each player shared in the vast profits of the tour at its conclusion. Sydney’s Victor Trumper toured England three times, returning with hundreds of pounds on each occasion. It seemed incongruous to many that rugby union players should be denied what other sportsmen enjoyed. It was also made clear by the NSWRU that referees could be paid, as could union and club officials.

‘I’ve been here almost a fortnight on this three-bob-a-day racket, and, after a couple of rum-and-milks in the morning, I’m broke!’ Harry Hammill, NSW representative 1906.

The ultimate trigger was the 1904 visit to Australia of a British Rugby Union team, followed by the 1905 All Blacks visit to Britain. Players in the 1904 British team revealed that each of them would be out of pocket by more than £100 by the time they returned home. The average working man’s wage was £50 a year.

The 1905 All Blacks tour was seen as an experiment, to see how much income a rugby tour could generate. The New Zealanders went away on 3s per day—including not being paid while at sea—and many gave up their job to take part in the tour. By the end of the tour, the NZRU had received a profit of more than £10,000. Some of the All Blacks returned home with no money in their pockets and no job. The NZRU paid the team’s manager a £300 bonus for a job well done.

While on the All Blacks tour, New Zealand’s George Smith met with officials of the NU. He’d been to England before as a hurdler and had been offered a contract with a NU club. In mid-1906 Smith came to Sydney with the Auckland club team for a week long visit which included matches against Souths, Newtown and the University. The



Auckland team also included promising young back, Lance Todd, who provided the name for the Rugby League Challenge Cup man-of-the-match medal. The visit of the Auckland team coincided with the NSW v. Queensland match at the SCG. Smith had the opportunity of watching Messenger in his first home game for the NSW Blues in front of a crowd of 32,000.

That evening, a 'great reunion' of footballers took place at a dinner in the city. By this time James Giltinan was mixing with rugby footballers. Smith revealed his plans to trusted confidants, and the move towards rugby league began in earnest in New Zealand, Sydney and Brisbane.



Dally Messenger

Messenger and Co.

By 1906 the interest in rugby union in Sydney was soaring. Over 25,000 packed the Sydney Sports Ground to watch the young upstarts of Easts, namely Dally Messenger and Albert Rosenfeld, take on the powerful men of South Sydney. I don't think a club rugby union match in Sydney, apart from perhaps a grand final, has ever reached those heights again. By July 1907 a NSW v. New Zealand match, with Messenger as the star, attracted over 52,000 to the SCG. No football matches (that charged an entry price) anywhere in the world drew crowds of this size, with the exception of the English FA Cup Final.

'Messrs Messenger and Co. are now Senior players, with the limelight of public attention and the stimulus of public interest and admiration upon them. The past is gone.'
The Referee, May 1906.

The size of the crowd and the gate money weren't lost on Messenger and his contemporaries, many of whom were working-class men. Their hands were their professional tools so that a football injury could cost them their employment and their future prospects. The profits from football labour could offer them financial security.

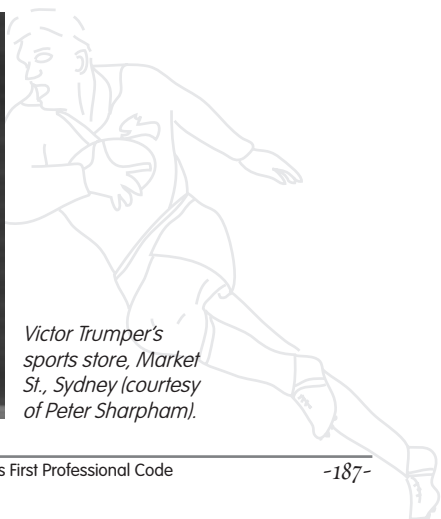
At a time when the coffers of the union were bulging, from 1906 to mid-1907, the conditions enjoyed by the players deteriorated rapidly as a result of the MRU and NSWRU actions. It seems that George Smith's visit had left behind something that changed the attitude of these two bodies, whose actions appear particularly heavy-handed—as if they were punishing the players and the clubs.

During this period the insurance scheme for injured players was removed. The NSWRU tried to take out a loan from the MRU reserves, and when that failed the MRU spent all the money buying Harold Park. This effectively removed any incentive for overthrowing the MRU and NSWRU from within—which I believe was the original intention.

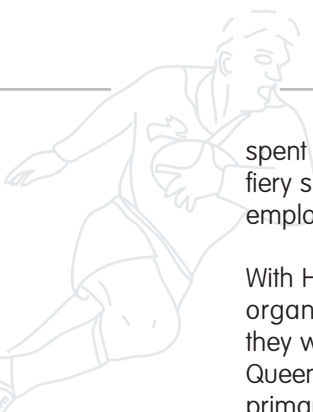
The MRU and the NSWRU suspected that an uprising was imminent, or even the formation of a rival organisation. Strong support for an equitable alternative to the MRU and NSWRU now existed amongst the rugby players of Sydney, particularly from the working class.

A Sydney reporter reflected on the mood of the city's working class: 'The Labor cauldron appears to be constantly seething'. He wrote of strikes in the collieries, tobacco workers, and the Government tram drivers, and added that 'The Arbitration Court apparently is all but useless'. Rugby was one area in which working-class men could take direct action.

The Bulletin was prepared to name the men fuelling the discontent in rugby, saying Giltinan and Trumper were behind the revolt, and making all sorts of promises to the footballers. They were soon joined by Henry 'Harry' Hoyle, a 54-year-old former Labor politician. Hoyle had



Victor Trumper's sports store, Market St., Sydney (courtesy of Peter Sharpham).



spent much of his working life in the trade union movement and his fiery speeches often invoked workers to rise up and challenge their employers through strikes and other activities.

With Hoyle providing the necessary 'call to arms' speeches, Giltinan organising the finances, and Trumper encouraging the players, they were ready to galvanise the dissatisfied elements of NSW and Queensland rugby into action. Their connection to the footballers came primarily through Glebe's Peter Moir 'who was in the habit of visiting Victor Trumper's sports depot' in Market Street.

Lunch-time meetings took place at Trumper's store of footballers and other sports. They often lasted for two hours (which was the custom at that time). Negotiations began with Baskerville and Smith in New Zealand. Either Trumper or Giltinan, or maybe both, gave the Kiwis an Australian cricket-style contract, which included Messenger's name, two months before the All Golds arrived in Sydney.

'Why shouldn't they get something out of the game besides kicks? You take it from me, if the right men start this professional movement in Sydney, they will get nearly every man.' Unnamed club secretary, July 1907.

It is spoken of as 'rugby league'

The NSWRL did not secure initially every player that it sought for season 1908. In fact, they obtained about half, with mostly senior players joining. Albert Baskerville revealed that many players, fearing black-banning by the NSWRU as professionals and the consequences of the NSWRL going under, 'were sitting on the fence', living in hope that the NSWRU would either cave-in to the players' demands, or be overthrown from within. In all likelihood, there would be a stampede to the league ranks once it had proven its stability and/or the NSWRU made it clear it would not cut the ties to England and the RFU.

The NSWRL adopted the same district club structure as the NSWRU. However, it made two significant changes. It eliminated a metropolitan body (the MRU in rugby), the so-called middleman that prevented the clubs and players from controlling the game at the state and Australian level. The other change was to provide the clubs with independent income. The gate-money from club matches was divided equally between the two clubs and the NSWRL.

Forming clubs was no difficult challenge. Since the first rugby clubs had been formed in the 1870s, at the start of each season, a meeting was held seeking to form each club for the coming season. A democratic feeling abounded in the early 1900s in that anything that required organisation immediately meant a meeting would be called to form an organising committee and to elect a president and secretary.

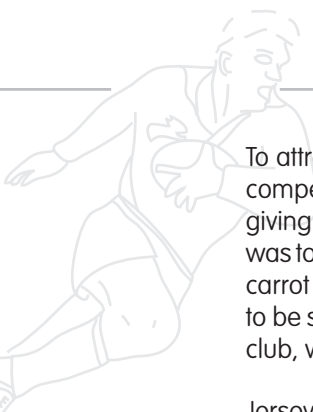
Under the MRU's district club scheme, the annual club meetings were open to the public. Any member of the public residing in the district could attend and vote, even without becoming a member of the club.

In most cases there was a 50/50 mix of active players and others. The committees generally reflected this ratio, with senior and recently retired players taking a very active role, alongside publicans, business leaders and politicians—all of whom stood to gain by their financial support of a club, many taking on the role of 'club patron', a position which brought with it an obligation to contribute financially to the club. Two of Australia's first Labor Prime Ministers took on these roles: Billy Hughes at Glebe and Chris Watson at Souths.

The income of the first rugby league clubs was provided from a mix of money generated by those watching the game, supported by private financiers. Surprisingly, this was not too far removed from the arrangements at Souths and Manly today. The difference though was that the members of the club, most of whom were active and recently-retired players, held the power to elect the committee members.

At a founding meeting in 1908 to form the Newcastle rugby league club, the gathering voted in favour of not forming a club. Giltinan overcame that difficulty by later organising a meeting of 15 footballers in private.

In Balmain, a week or so after the rugby league club was formed, when the local rugby union club held its annual meeting, the League-ites attended in force and had the numbers. They voted against every motion seeking to elect committee members and form a club for the 1908 season. The meeting had to be terminated, and there were brawls and scuffles outside the hall, with one man reportedly taken to hospital with a knife wound. The MRU ensured the next club meeting was held at the same time as the next Balmain rugby league club meeting. They didn't call them the 'Balmainiacs' for nothing!



To attract the players, the League paid for jerseys, training halls, and compensated players for time off work caused by injuries and tours, giving them up to £1 per week. This furthered their first objective, which was to get the rank-and-file club players. However, they also offered the carrot of a Kangaroo tour to England, along cricket lines with the profits to be shared. There was also the chance to attract an offer from a NU club, which many players later secured, including Albert Rosenfeld.

Jersey Flegg said of the League's intention: 'When the League was founded its first principle was that the players must come first. If a player can better himself (financially) going overseas, then he must be allowed to do so.' To add further appeal, Giltinan did not ask any of the selected Kangaroos to put in £50 each to fund the tour. The best rugby league players, unlike the All Golds and earlier cricket tourists, could not have afforded to take part. Instead, Giltinan borrowed £2000 and ultimately went bankrupt as a result of poor gates for the Kangaroo tour due to labour strikes and horrendously poor weather. While Giltinan must have hoped for a profit from the tour, he took all the risk on himself.

'Nothing but a nine-day wonder'

As soon as the NSWRL was formed, the newspapers and the NSWRL officials began an earnest campaign to scare and intimidate the footballers, particularly the younger ones.

The NSWRL All Blues team selected to play against the Professional All Blacks (Sydney, 1907) –

Back Row: Charlie Hedley, G Brackenreg, Arthur Hennessy, Bill Farnsworth, 'Tedda' Courtney, George Boss, Alf Dobbs.

Third Row: Henry Hoyle, Bob Graves, Peter Moir, Harry Hammill, Harry Glanville, Sid 'Sandy' Pearce, Alec Burdon, H Cleeve.

Second Row: John Stuntz, Billy Cann, 'Son' Fry, James Giltinan, Dally Messenger, Herb Brackenreg, Bob Mable.

Front Row: Lou D'Alpuget, Frank Cheadle, Albert Rosenfeld, John 'Darb' Hickey.



Two players dropped out of the NSW 'All Blues' team after appearing in the team photo: Glebe's John Hickey and Newtown's Billy Farnsworth. Both though would join the League two years later during the Wallabies exodus. Despite signing to play rugby league, and being in the team photo, both players escaped any sanction by the NSWRLU.

In England though, during the Wallabies 1908 tour, the photo surfaced in the press, and Hickey had some explaining to do. He told the press and the RFU that the man in the photo was his brother. This excuse worked!

Most critics questioned the stability of the NSWRL, how long it would last, and the real intentions of Giltinan, Trumper and Hoyle. Many predicted the League

would be ripped apart by internal arguments over money, once any profit was made. Any player who had gone to the League was informed that he would be banned for life, and could not return to rugby union. Much of the press carried on about the so-called evils of professionalism—where young men living off their football earnings would have too much free time, too much money, and this would lead to nothing but decadence, and ultimately, leave the man unfit for any useful life once the football ended and his money ran out. This argument was aimed at players who were simply being compensated for lost earnings, so it was really a nonsense argument. Even Messenger had to keep working in the family boatshed. Why such an argument didn't apply to professionals in other sports could never be explained.

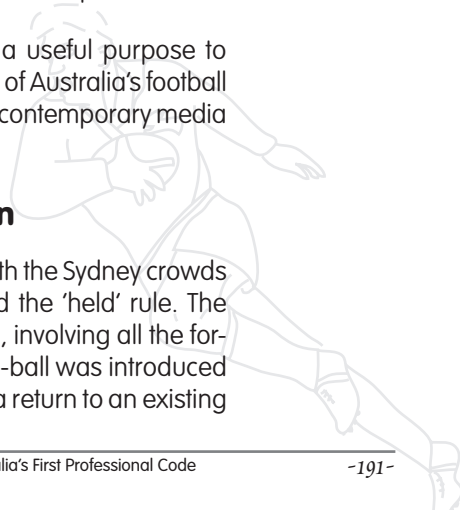
Of course, such warnings would have served a useful purpose to football administrators of the mid-1990s, when all of Australia's football codes turned professional. However, none of our contemporary media commentators showed such foresight.

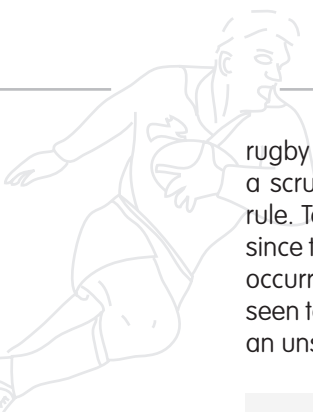
The motor car v. the bullock wagon

What made rugby league so instantly popular with the Sydney crowds and footballers? It wasn't the 'play-the-ball' and the 'held' rule. The play-the-ball was in fact a loosely formed scrum, involving all the forwards. While it has been stated that the play-the-ball was introduced to rugby league in Britain in 1906, it was actually a return to an existing

'Professional football cannot live here unless a miracle happens—and miracles do not enter into the football world. If any player be so foolish to join he will merely commit football suicide.'

The Arrow, 3 August 1907.





rugby union rule. The NU had earlier replaced the play-the-ball with a scrum, and in 1906 reverted to the old rugby union play-the-ball rule. Together with the held rule, the play-the-ball had been in place since the 1870s. They were considered necessary to ensure no mauls occurred, the game was safe, and, importantly, gentlemen were not seen to be scruffing about on their hands and knees on the ground in an unseemly and scrappy mess.



The visits in 1908 and 1909 of 'The New Zealand Maoris' rugby league team was a spectacular success in NSW and Queensland. This photograph was taken during a match against NSW in Sydney in 1908.

'The general feeling is that the crowd will go where the best football is to be seen.' *Sydney Morning Herald*, August 1907.

By the early 1900s, both in rugby union and rugby league in England, referees simply blew their whistle after each tackle, and ordered a scrum, avoiding the play-the-ball. In Sydney, the NSWRU, under pressure to speed up the game, allowed rucks and mauls to enter the game though a number of writers complained that this was not rugby at all. In all the articles in 1908 discussing the introduction of rugby league, none referred to the play-the-ball or held rules.

The major differences that were highlighted were that teams were 13-a-side, the absence of line-outs and outlawing of kicking into touch on the full. The re-issued version of *The Rugby Rebellion*, *The Pioneers of*

Rugby League, includes some of these articles as well as a copy of the 1908 playing laws. Here are some typical comments from the time.

The public were puzzled for a time, they probably expected some of the old-fashioned wrestlings and tussles of Rugby, and the noise. The noise? [At first I had no idea what the writer was getting at].

Here were men flitting about silently—hardly a sound came from the field. The players were too busy with their eyes and legs and arms to have much energy to spare for talking. Occasionally would come a cry ‘Throw it about!’, but otherwise the tactics were agreeably free from uproar [sledging].

After the spectators had recovered from their first surprise, they must have felt that common-sense had a good deal to say in the Northern Union scheme of things.

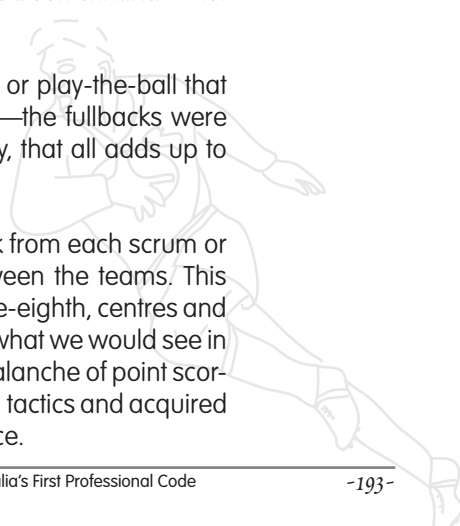
A scrum had ‘replaced the wearisome throw-in’ from touch—at that time the rugby union laws allowed play to restart with a line-out or a scrum.

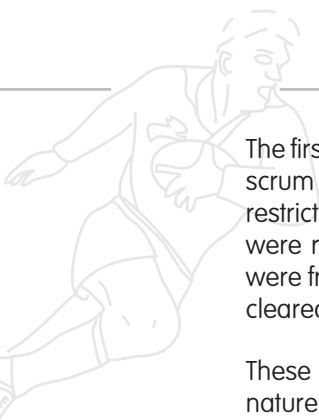
Neither side showed any fondness for finding the line. The forwards, knowing that if they let the ball go out they would have to rush up and bend their backs for a scrum, used their feet judiciously and did not indulge in wild-booting.

Forwards now had to not only use their feet on the ball carefully, but had to use their hands (passing) and their heads (thinking). To see a back artfully bounce a ball into touch would have been criminal—not that anyone had mastered the art anyway!

Forwards moved about in a pack, and a scrum or play-the-ball that involved every forward and the two half-backs—the fullbacks were more akin to goal-keepers—compared to today, that all adds up to eight players not being in the defence line!

In addition, both back-lines were ready to attack from each scrum or play-the-ball, creating even further space between the teams. This vast open space allowed the attacking team’s five-eighths, centres and wingers, to run and pass in space equivalent to what we would see in seven-a-side rugby league. We didn’t see an avalanche of point scoring as the players didn’t have the training, fitness, tactics and acquired skills of today’s players to better exploit that space.





The first step towards changing the play-the-ball from a loose 12-man scrum came into being in the 1920s, when the play-the-ball itself, was restricted to just two players from each team. All the other forwards were required to remain within five yards of the play-the-ball, and were free to join in the contest for possession if the ball hadn't quickly cleared the ruck.

These wide open spaces at every play-the-ball or scrum were signature features of rugby league's first 50 years, and the explanation why old-timers from the 1960s onwards constantly bemoaned that forwards were getting in the way of the backs. By the early 1960s the play-the-ball was streamlined to just four players, and everyone else had to be back set ruck distances, ultimately the five-metre rule. In the early 1960s the practice began of allowing the tackled player to invariably keep possession. The effect of both changes meant that attacking backlines now had to confront seven extra defenders, cover defence, and 'spotting'—no wonder, despite the warnings from the 1908'ers, that the game ended up with bash-and-barge football!

These wide open spaces at every play-the-ball or scrum were signature features of rugby league's first 50 years, and the explanation why old-timers from the 1960s onwards constantly bemoaned that forwards were getting in the way of the backs.

The saviour was the limited tackle football in 1967, but today, 40 years later, under the 10 metre rule, inter-change and full-time training, the play-the-ball has become the game itself, instead of being, as it was in 1908, simply a means to re-start the game. In 1908, when attackers were confronted with a situation where there was every likelihood of being tackled with the ball, they erred on the side of off-loading or kicking the ball, rather than chancing a play-the-ball. The rules ensured there was no certainty of winning the play-the-ball—the effect, compared to today, was more speculative play.

The elimination of rugby union's breakaways, together with the law requiring half-backs to retire behind their packs, de-powered the scrummaging compared to rugby union. The changes effectively guaranteed that the ball would come out of every scrum and play-the-ball would proceed quickly setting the ball once again into the hands of the backs. The tendency of the rules is to keep the play open was noted in one account.

In comparison in rugby union, attacking and passing movements by backs were infrequent, as the ball would not often reach the half-back, or when it did, he already had defenders pouncing on him.

By contrast, League featured rapid passing movements, and quick scrums and play-the-ball and with no line-outs or kicking for touch, the game was constantly on the move and visible to the spectators, the players and the referee. Many of the players preferred the more open and fast play, rather than the scrummaging and bullocking of rugby union, as they called it. With the ball always visible to the spectators, it brought the crowd into the game, giving them a say, an emotional input, a voice and an opinion.

The *Herald* noted that ‘the verdict of the 50,000 people who witnessed the matches on Saturday and Monday was that the difference between the new rugby and the old rugby is as a motor car compared to the bullock wagon.’

Another aspect was the prompt actions of the NSWRL and their referees. When teams tried to pack more than three men in the front row and return a focus upon scrummaging, the NSWRL considered the problem on the following Monday night. It then immediately amended the playing laws to fix the number in the front row as three. This rule was implemented on the following Saturday. This was a telling example of the differences between League and Union, and the ability of the former to implement changes to benefit the game. The NSWRL, tied to England, could not introduce reforms until the RFU and IRB adopted them. Rugby Union in Australia today is still suffering the same difficulty.

While the NSWRL had adopted the laws of the NU, it had no compunction to change them if need be to suit local priorities and to ensure that the code stayed ahead of its competitors. Wanting a set of international rules to fit every country was desirable, but of little value if the code’s flagship competition suffered in the mean time—something not lost on subsequent League administrators right through the 20th century.

‘The verdict of the 50,000 people who witnessed the matches on Saturday and Monday was that the difference between the new rugby and the old rugby is as a motor car compared to the bullock wagon.’



Dead to the world

Ironically, the success of the League at the representative level in 1908, and the money it brought in, produced the very in-fighting that the doomsayers had predicted. Built on a principle of democracy—where the club members elected the club committee, who then elected their club representative on the NSWRL committee—rapid and substantial profits were made from the visit of the Kiwis and then the Maoris. This new wealth posed further questions.

Giltinan had said that control of the League would eventually be given to the committee, but it didn't come quickly enough. Even before the 1908 Kangaroos had left Sydney, it was apparent that Giltinan, Hoyle and Trumper would be fortunate to see out the League's second season. When a secret account was uncovered in early 1909—which from this distance seems to have been intended to fund the Kangaroos v. Wallabies matches—the three founders were overthrown.

Through the first half of the 1909 season the NSWRL got by on the earnings from Balmain matches at Birchgrove Oval. So dependent had the League become on this income, that it scheduled a Balmain game at the ground every Saturday. When the representative matches came along, primarily the second tour of the Maoris, the League was suddenly in boom times again, and all its financial woes disappeared in the space of a week, with 30,000 strong crowds at the Agricultural Ground.

At the same time, the NSWRU was beginning to haemorrhage from the costs of the war with the League because it had begun to match the League in regard to player allowances, free jerseys and injury compensation. The belated actions of the NSWRU were insufficient. Most regarded it as duplicitous and a reaction to the formation of the League. Many had no doubt that the benefits would disappear once they had brought the League down. Further attempts were made to overthrow the NSWRU from within, to make them change the rules and cut their ties to the RFU but the Arnolds stood firm.



The 1909 'New Zealand Maoris' rugby league team and touring party.

Given this setting, the seemingly sudden decision of half the 1908 Wallabies to agree to play in rugby league matches against the Kangaroos, was hardly surprising. The Wallabies though drove a hard bargain for their services, with Chris McKivat leading the charge and obtaining over £150. The Wallabies received money that none of the men who formed the League in August 1907 received. The Wallabies could have jumped solely for the plum—but none did. Their contracts were only for the matches against the Kangaroos. They gained confidence from the rapidly growing rugby league around them, and the news that Jimmy Lomas's British Lions rugby league team would be touring in 1910. The Wallabies' defection was not the cause of rugby league's revival, it was evidence of how rugby league was well on the way to winning.

'What has so far saved the League from itself, is that the game it controls is spectacular, and therefore popular.'

The Referee, June 1909

Matches against Lomas's team were immensely popular and the standard of play between the teams created unprecedented interest in rugby league. The NSWRL was buoyant at the gate-takings: almost 100,000 patrons witnessed the three opening games of the tour. The NSW v. New Zealand rugby union match, on the adjacent SCG, which had attracted 52,000 in 1907, drew only 16,000 because of the competition from League. With no income, the NSWRU retreated into full amateurism to ensure its survival. The war was over.



Kangaroosters

I'll conclude here with the words of Tom Peters, secretary of the South Sydney Rabbitohs, written after the first Wallabies v. Kangaroos match in August 1909:

At last, the day of emancipation has arrived—and all honour to the gallant little band of twenty-two who started the League movement a little over two years ago. This little forlorn hope party were the recipients of threats, sneers and verbal abuse from all the snob followers of so-called amateurism in NSW. But they bore it all smilingly and battled quietly onwards—ever onwards, up till today.

'So trusting to see you, one and all, in League teams next season, and wearing the insignia of your country, that is, The Kangaroo!'

And what a sudden change. Hosts of players in NSW, New Zealand and Queensland under NU rules, to mention nothing of wires of congratulations to the League from inland country districts and coastal towns as well, asking for affiliation. Secessions wholesale of junior (third grade) teams from the Union ranks, and dozens of prominent players from the Union already looking for places in the League ranks for next season.

It is very pleasing, brethren, to us all—men who have fought day and night for this movement. For we all had one ambition and one beacon light ever before us: 'To make the lot of the player a



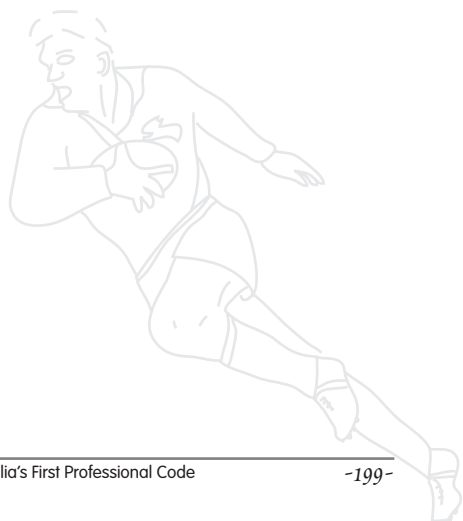
South Sydney RLFC's Billy Cann, who played for the Australian rugby league team in the Third Test against New Zealand in 1908. The kangaroo insignia was adapted by official RL bodies across all levels of the code.

better one'. No inspired scribe can prejudice our cause, for this one little fact—the public are the sole arbiters of either League or Union, for upon their patronage we both either stand or fall.

So trusting to see you one and all in League teams next season, and wearing the insignia of your country, that is, The Kangaroo.

References:

References and extensive footnotes for this lecture can be found in *The Rugby Rebellion: Pioneers of Rugby League* by Sean Fagan (ISBN 978-0-9757563-0-0).

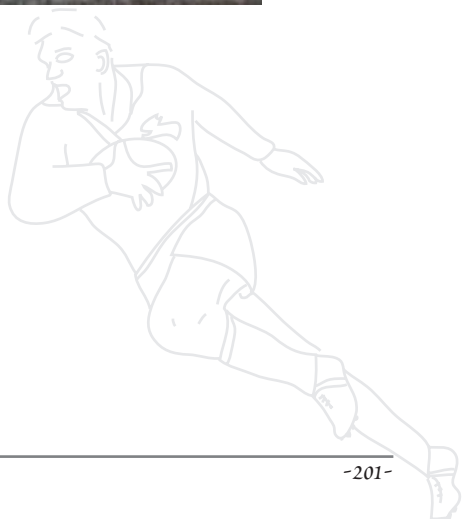




From a Federation Game to a League of Nations

6 November 2008,
Bowlers Club, Sydney

Lex Marinus OAM





I was born in Wagga Wagga and have been seeing double ever since. As a kid I used to dream of holidays in Woy Woy and Kurri Kurri and travelling over the Mooney Mooney Bridge. I can still remember the thrill when *Gatum Gatum* won the 1961 Melbourne Cup.

My favourite dances are cancan and cha-cha-cha; my preferred food—couscous and gado-gado; Governor-general—Isaac Isaacs; Senator—George Georges. I even thought Roger Rogerson was innocent. Needless to say, my favourite rugby league player is Fui Fui Moi Moi.

However, this duplicity made sense to me, growing up in post-Second World War Australia, and I wrote about it in 1995:

From an early age I had an understanding that there were two worlds. The first was when the shop was open, the day to day world of commerce, which brought the outside in to us. For fifteen hours a day customers would come and go as my family worked to please them and become part of this larger society.

The second world existed when the shop was closed. Especially on Sunday nights when the shop closed early. Then the other Greek families, a dozen or so, many of them café owners as well, would congregate at one café or another. The tables would be pushed back to create some space for dancing. A gramophone would materialise, as would a collection of 78s bought from specialty shops in Sydney or Melbourne, or brought directly from Greece by friends and relatives. Bouncy pop songs and mournful *rembetika*. *Komboloi* would spin back and forth around chunky fingers. Cards and *tavli* (backgammon) [would be played]. A couple of bottles of wine would produce barrels of laughter. Voices loud and excited. With more animation and emotion and expression speaking Greek in private than they could achieve speaking English in public. And every sentence [was] embellished by theatrical gestures.

And then there was the food. Lamb baked with garlic and oregano. Cabbage rolls. Spinach and beans in olive oil and lemon juice. Olives. Fetta. Yoghurt. Rice. Pasta. Sticky sweets. Sugar-coated almonds. Food that we ate. Food that was never

on the café menu. I thought it was our secret food. Fight it as I might, sleep always overtook me before the night had ended.

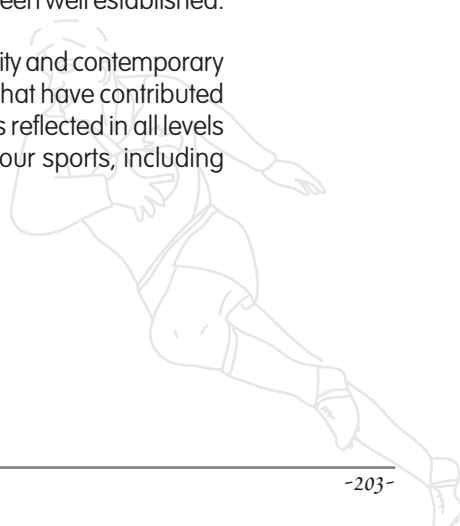
And the next morning the front doors would again be open for business, and again the outside world would come in and we would go about our business of serving steak and eggs, fish and chips, mixed grill. And we would also continue our efforts at assimilation.

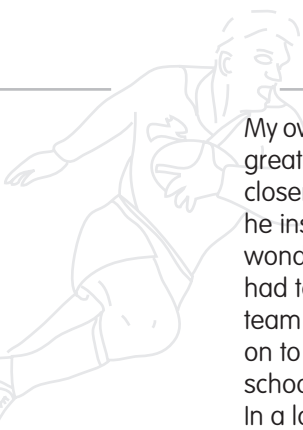
Both these worlds coexisted in a functional, albeit cautious relationship. Peaceful most of the time. Disrupted by an occasional drunk. The first time I heard the word 'dago', I knew without knowing its meaning that it was not a good thing to be. Evidently my grandfather was one. So too was my father. I concluded that I was as well.¹

Despite the rather melodramatic labelling, being something else, the 'other' has often provided some discomfort within Australia's history. The feeling of belonging is equally strong, and in Australia, one way to belong, to move from the outside in, was to pursue popular national sports: swimming, tennis and cricket in summer; football in winter. The choice of code was determined largely by region, religion, cultural heritage or class. It hasn't always been easy to belong in Australia.

Pre-1788 Australia was 100 per cent Indigenous but with diverse cultural practices, hundreds of languages and some limited contact with nations to the north. There were 33 different nationalities on the First Fleet. Within 120 years, when Australian rugby league emerged in 1908, the Australian population was predominantly Anglo-Celtic, though many other immigrant communities had been well established.

Diversity has always been a part of Australian Identity and contemporary Australia is a reflection of the waves of migration that have contributed to the constantly evolving nature of that identity. It is reflected in all levels of society, in our sciences and arts as well as in our sports, including rugby league.





My own introduction to rugby league was via John Mavroudis, the first great player I saw. Like me, John was from a Greek family and in the closeness of the Wagga community, we grew up together. Unlike me, he instinctively understood rugby league and how to play it. He had wonderful hands, was fast in the brain and fast in the legs when he had to be. Picture Laurie Daley. John led our four stone seven pound team to a primary school premiership as I tried desperately to hang on to his coattails. For the next two decades John did the same with school teams: the Wagga Magpies and Riverina representative sides. In a later era, he would have played professionally, but he rewarded the labour of his parents by becoming a very successful accountant. Sadly, John's son David was one of the Coogee Dolphins killed in the Bali bombing. It wasn't just that John was an outstanding player, he impressed me at how easily he fitted in with everyone and how sport provided a way for him to belong.

In this lecture I'd like to dip into rugby league history to try to suggest patterns of participation at the elite level of players from non-Anglo backgrounds. Non-Anglo is a very general classification for someone whose cultural heritage and practice may be partly or wholly separate from that of the Australian British-Irish majority.

But first a word of caution: my approach will be largely anecdotal drawing on the known background and surnames of players. The latter approach, as I later point out, has its pitfalls as some players with Anglo names may have had a 'migrant' mother. Others with migrant names have may had an Anglo mother.

The Kangaroos player register from the official Australian Rugby League website has been a useful starting point for my research. Sean Fagan's site [RL1908](#) has also been extremely valuable. I also consulted a number of other club and general sites. I have also perused some books and old programmes—quaint, old-fashioned sentimentalist that I am.

German rugby league players

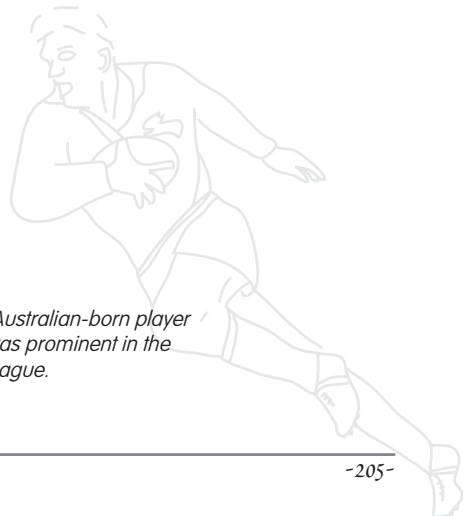
The largest group of non-British Europeans in Australia were German settlers and their descendants. Beginning in 1838, with the arrival of immigrants from Prussia, Germans became prominent mainly in South Australia and Queensland until the First World War when Kaiser Bill brought all that to a stop. During rugby league's pioneering days in Federation Australia northern Europeans contributed to the code. Being Christian and fair-complexioned they assimilated easily. A number of immigrant sons played rugby league.

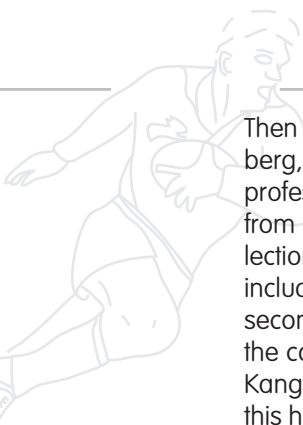
Pioneer players included Denis 'Dinny' Lutge (1879–1953), foundation captain of North Sydney in 1908. A dual international, he played in each of Australia's inaugural rugby Tests against New Zealand. He was the second-ever Kangaroo captain and the first to lead the side to a victory.

Another dual international was E.A. 'George' Anlezark, who was born in Bathurst in 1882. Anlezark never played for any of Sydney's founding rugby league clubs, but as a professional footballer he played in New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland, New Zealand and ultimately in England. He was a member of the 1908–09 pioneer Kangaroos remaining in England after the tour and playing for Oldham. Like many of the early professionals, he made a career in England.



George Anlezark, an Australian-born player of German descent, was prominent in the early years of rugby league.





Then there was Wilhelm Gustaf 'Bill' Heidke (1882–1958) from Bundaberg, Queensland. After he appeared for Queensland against the professional New Zealand All Golds in June 1908 he was suspended from rugby union and went over to League. A utility back, he won selection for the inaugural Kangaroo squad of 1908, playing in two Tests including the first ever played at Wembley. Heidke was selected for the second Test v. Great Britain in Brisbane in 1910 when he was awarded the captaincy over Dally Messenger. Heidke was Australia's seventh Kangaroo captain, and the first Queensland and winger to achieve this honour. After Australia lost 22–17 Heidke became the last winger to captain Australia. Bill's younger brother Harold also represented for Queensland, and in 1932, Bill's son, Les 'Monty' Heidke, also became a Kangaroo. This was the second Australian father-son representative combination coming just one week behind Sandy and Joe Pearce.

Johnno Stuntz of Sydney also played against the New Zealand 'All Golds'. A winger, he played in Easts' first match—the opening game of club rugby league in Australia—when he scored four tries. This tally, for the most tries on debut in Australian premiership history, has been equalled but not bettered. Stuntz represented Australia against a touring New Zealand Maori side in 1909. During the 1909–10 English season, Stuntz played for Warrington. He also played for South Sydney (1911), Western Suburbs (1913) and New South Wales (1911). It is a matter of irony that this player with a German ancestry died fighting for the Allies on the Western Front in 1916.

Herb Brackenreg, a front-row forward, had also been a rebel who played against the New Zealand 'All Golds'. He played in eight matches for Easts including that first match and the first premiership decider against local rival, South Sydney. He also represented NSW before moving to Brisbane, playing for Queensland and Australia. Apparently, Brackenreg once beat Dally Messenger in a goal-kicking competition.

Another among the pioneering greats was Albert Aaron Rosenfeld (1885–1970). Born in Sydney, the son of a Jewish tailor, Rosenfeld played for Eastern Suburbs (1908–09) and later for the Huddersfield, Warrington and Bradford clubs in England. He played four Tests in the inaugural series against New Zealand and during the Kangaroo tour of 1908–09 signed with Huddersfield. He had fallen in love with a local mill manager's daughter whom he later married. At Huddersfield, he moved to the wing and became a try-scoring sensation scoring 78 tries in 1911–12. Two seasons later he eclipsed this record scoring 80 tries.

The nearest anyone has come to this record was the 72 tries scored by another former Rooster, Brian Bevan, in the 1952–53 season. Rosenfeld died in 1970, the last survivor of the inaugural Kangaroo tour.

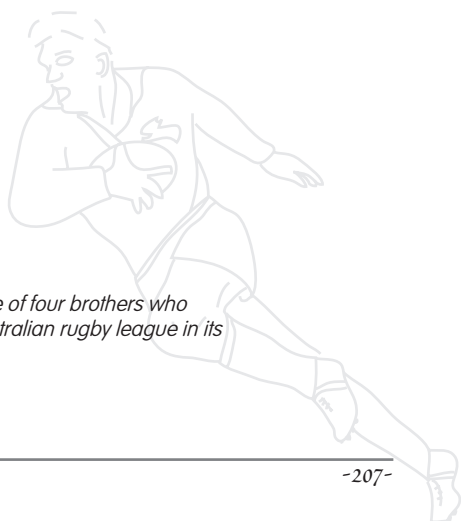
Albert Rosenfeld's try-scoring feats (391 career tries) earned him in a place in the British Rugby League Hall of Fame in 1988. Rosenfeld was also accepted into the International Jewish Sports Hall of Fame in 2005. Rosenfeld was also named in the list of Australia's *100 Greatest Players* commissioned by the National Rugby League (NRL) and the Australian Rugby League (ARL) to celebrate the code's centenary year in Australia in February 2008.

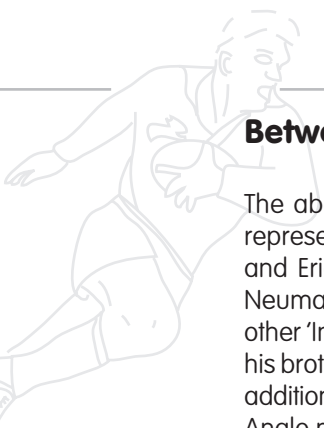
The four Polish Bolewski brothers of Glebe and Bundaberg were also prominent. Michael ('Mick') was a member of the 1908–09 Kangaroo tour who remained in England to play for Leigh. Henry also played a Test against Great Britain in 1914 while Walter was a Queensland representative. A fourth brother, Alex, also played representative rugby league.

During those early years Glebe also fielded Ogaard and Fritz Thiering. East players included Lou D'Alpuget, J. Le Petit, Sid 'Sandy' Kaufmann and W. Tijou. J. Appolloney, Bill Schultz and Reg 'Whip' Latta played for Balmain. Schultz and Latta became Kangaroos after the First World War. By my reckoning nine of 94 (9.5 per cent) Kangaroos from 1908 to 1914 were of non-British-Irish, predominantly German, heritage.



Mick Bolewski was one of four brothers who were prominent in Australian rugby league in its formative years.





Between the wars

The above trend was sustained between the wars with Kangaroo representatives included 'Immortals' Joe 'Chimpy' Busch, Ray Stehr and Eric Weissel, as well as Queenslanders Eric Frauenfelder, Fred Neumann and Les Heidke. It is easy to overlook the background of another 'Immortal', Frank Burge (1894–1958) of Glebe and St George and his brothers. The Burges were Australian-born of a German family: the addition of a final 'e' to the surname of Burg transformed it to a common Anglo name. Frank Burge played thirteen Tests for Australia between 1914 and 1922 and was named on the bench for the ARL's Team of the Century. His two elder brothers, Peter and Albert, represented Australia in rugby on the inaugural Wallaby tour of Britain and America. They later switched codes and played with Frank as did another brother, Laidley. In fact, Peter was chosen for the 1911–12 Kangaroo tour to Great Britain though he didn't play any Tests.

I have great interest in Joe 'Chimpy' Busch, who went from being a professional fisherman on the far north coast of NSW to Australian Test halfback within the space of months. He was spotted by Easts' star and talent scout 'Dinny' Campbell. Dinny played for the Wallabies before switching codes and played alongside Dally Messenger in Easts' first premiership-winning sides. He also represented NSW, before moving to England, and had nine very successful seasons with Leeds, when he scored 136 tries. Dinny had one final season with Eastern Suburbs in 1921. (I mention Dinny because his daughter Olive Grigg is my mother-in-law. She remembers Dinny bringing 'Chimpy' home for an occasional meal.)

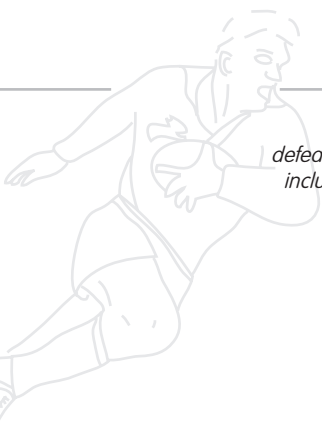
Eric Weissel (1903–72) is also a favourite having played his entire career for clubs in the Riverina (NSW), including the Wagga Wagga Magpies. He captained an unbeaten Cootamundra side to successive Maher Cups. This was an era when country football was still strong. Weissel played two Tests against the touring British side in 1928 and made the Kangaroo touring squad of 1929–30 topping the tour point scoring with five tries and 56 goals. He played in three Tests of the 1932 Ashes series, including the brutal 'Battle of Brisbane' where his heroic 75-yard hobble on a broken ankle inspired a battered and bruised Australian team to a 15–6 victory. Weissel was also a fair cricketer. Playing for a Riverina against Southern Districts in 1926, he dismissed Don Bradman for 43 when Bradman made his SCG debut.

Since 1976, the Eric Weissel medal has been awarded to the best and fairest player in the Riverina. In 1959 the Eric Weissel Oval, a 10,000-seat stadium in Wagga Wagga was named in his honour. Since then, it has been a Mecca for all aspiring young footballers in the Riverina. Sadly, this iconic venue of country rugby league, that has hosted Test and World Cup matches, Country-City and NRL matches as well as countless schoolboy knockout competitions, has been sold for development: a manifestation of the waning status of rugby league in some regional areas.

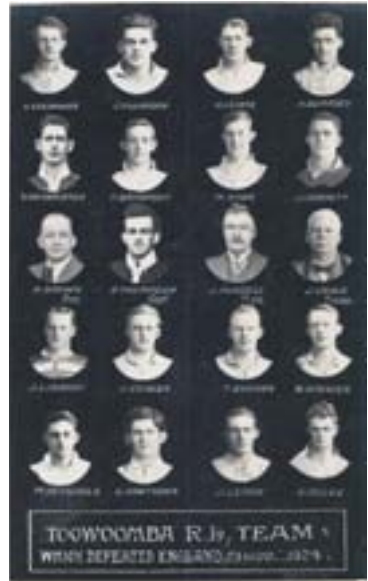
Raymond Ernest Stehr (1913–83), the Eastern Suburbs hard man, was also from the country, coming from Warialda in NSW. Despite spinal complications during childhood, Stehr defied medical opinion to become one of the toughest players of a very rugged sport. Recruited from Randwick Boys' High School in 1928, Stehr made his first-grade debut in a trial match aged just 15. In the following season, aged just 16 years and 85 days, he made his first-grade debut, and is still the youngest Australian player to do so. Stehr was a member of the legendary Eastern Suburbs side that lost just one match, winning premierships in 1935, 1936 and 1937. In 1940 he captained Easts to its eighth premiership and repeated this success in 1945. He was selected for the 1933–34 Kangaroo tour when he was sent off in two of the three Tests. He toured again in 1937–38. Stehr represented Australia 55 times including 11 Tests, played 33 matches for NSW and appeared in 184 club game.

Among the *100 Greatest Players* of that era is another tough prop, Herb Steinhof from Queensland's Darling Downs. His father had emigrated from Denmark in the late nineteenth century. Herb joined a talented Toowoomba Valleys side in 1922 that included Matt Heisler, Harry Liebke, Fred Prouten and Bob Miebusch. Herb played more than 130 games for the famous Toowoomba Clydesdales side and represented Queensland from 1924 to 1933. He played nine Tests for Australia between 1928 and 1932, captaining Australia in the last three.²

The Eastern Suburbs lock-forward Andy Norval was part of Easts' dominant forward pack of the 1930s. The Norval name is possibly of Swedish origin (though it is also a Scottish surname). Born in South Australia, where he played Australian Rules, Norval began his rugby league career in Newcastle before moving to Sydney. He played in 105 matches with Easts between 1934 and 1941 and was a member of four premiership and three runner-up sides. He was selected on the



The 1924 Toowoomba side that defeated the touring British side in 1924 included four players with non-British-Irish names: Herb Steinhohrt, Harry Liebke, Vic Armbruster and M. Heuschele.



1937–38 Kangaroo tour and played in three Tests, on the wing. Norval was named in the list of Australia's *100 Greatest Players*.

Herb Narvo, whose name was originally Nawo, had German ancestry. Sydney-born, but raised in Newcastle, Narvo signed with Newtown in 1937 and gained a late call up to 1937 Kangaroo tour, playing in four Tests. During the War, Narvo helped Newtown win the 1943 premiership but missed the following year's final due to his RAAF service. After the war Narvo joined St George steering the club to a Grand Final, which was lost to Balmain. During this period he was also the Australian heavyweight boxing champion.

Based on the ARL Kangaroos player register it appears that 22 of 218 (10 per cent) of the Kangaroos from 1908 to 1937 were of non-British-Irish backgrounds with players of German heritage being particularly prominent. This is similar to the numbers between 1908 and 1914 (10 of 94, 10.6 per cent).

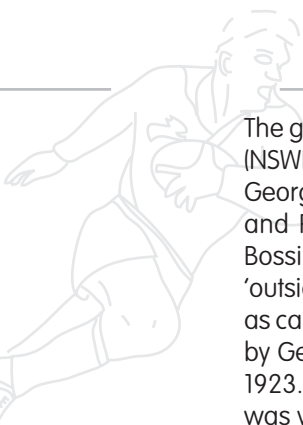
During the second half of the nineteenth century Australia's abundant opportunities attracted an increasing number of immigrants. European migrants, which included entrepreneurs, peasants, farmers and artisans, built places of worship, established cultural and social



During the 1920s and 1930s rugby league players had more opportunities to excel at other sports than contemporary players. Herb Narvo was both a star in rugby league and boxing, becoming an Australian heavyweight boxing champion.

clubs and formed sporting teams. In the prevailing assimilationist atmosphere generated by Federation, many immigrant sons began playing the local, working class (and often Catholic) sport.³ The number of Chinese migrants also expanded dramatically from the time of the gold rushes.

This diversity was reflected at club level in Sydney. University players in 1923 included L. Halberstater and E.S. Ogg. Roy Beiber played for St George and Souths in the 1920s. Wests had J. Rosa (1930), Newtown fielded Hans Mork and his brothers, who were South African-born of Swiss parents, while Norths was positively exotic. Just flicking through Andrew Moore's history of the club, *The Mighty Bears!*, players of that inter-wars era include Deitz, Emelhenz, Arneman, Wunsch, Medina, Costa, Schiemer and the Dhu brothers. Norths had slick centre Herman Peters, another German Australian, who played four games for the Kangaroos on the 1921–22 tour of Great Britain. He kept a fascinating diary. Norths also had two black players, George Green and Paul Tranquille. Their probable ancestry is debated in Moore's book but either or both were Indigenous or possibly Afro-Caribbean and Mauritian respectively. (Despite the uncertainty about his background, Green was subsequently chosen in Indigenous Team of the Century!)



The great St George club entered the New South Wales Rugby League (NSWRL) in 1921 and its first match was against Glebe. Although St George kept Glebe tryless, it lost 4–3. Herb Gilbert was captain-coach and Roy ‘Bunny’ Bossi was the hooker. The reserves included A. Bossi and Lew Heuschkel. Two seasons later Saints imported the first ‘outsider’ to Sydney football. Huatahi Turoa Brown Paki had impressed as captain of the 1922 Maori touring team, before being lured to Saints by George Carstairs. Paki played 15 games and scored three tries in 1923. He became a great administrator and an ambassador and was very influential in the development of Maori rugby league within the Waikato region. It’s almost impossible to imagine an NRL game nowadays without Maori players, so pervasive is their influence, but ‘Brownie’ was the first. But who was the first Chinese Australian first grader? Many believe that it was Billy Hong, Easts fullback/winger for a couple of seasons (1930–31).

Before leaving this era, cricket provides another illustration of the contribution of the German community to Australian sport and the adoption of the majority sport by cultural minorities. The only players of non-British-Irish heritage that appeared in Australian Test cricket from 1877 to 1938 were of German heritage:

- Dr Albert Ernst Victor Hartkopf (1889–1968), all rounder for Victoria played one Test against England at Melbourne in 1924–25. (Hartkopf also played 58 games for University in the Victorian Football League between 1908 and 1911 and kicked 87 goals).
- Otto Ernest Nothling (1900–65), an all rounder from Queensland who first came to attention while at Sydney University. He played in the second Test v. England in 1928–29, (D.G. Bradman 12th man). He also represented NSW at rugby union in 1923 and 1924.
- H.C. ‘Jack’ Nitschke (aka Slinger) (1905–82), was an attacking left-hand batsman from Adelaide who played twice against South Africa in 1931–32.
- Hans Ebeling (1905–80), tall medium-pacer from Melbourne was a member of the 1934 Australian side in England and played one Test.⁴

At the same time Hubert Opperman was earning international acclaim with his endurance cycling feats.

Post-Second World War

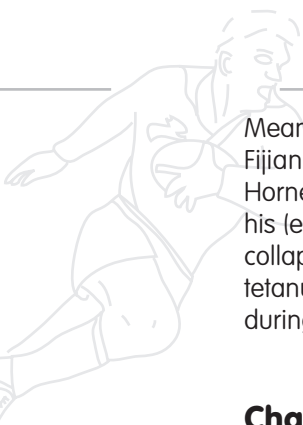
After the Second World War, Australia chose to 'populate' rather than 'perish'. Large-scale migration irrevocably changed the country's identity. The impact would not be fully felt for another generation. Another 230 Kangaroos over the next 25 years included former captain 'Joe' Jorgenson, Balmain forward Fred De Belin (eight Tests), Peter Diversi, North's team of century lock and 1954 World Cup member; Newcastle champions Terry Pannowitz and Allan Buman; Queenslanders Elton Rasmussen, Bob Gehrke, Mick Veivers, Angelo Crema, Dennis Manteit, Col Weiss and John Wittenberg—all of them rugged, no-nonsense forwards. Former Australian and Dragons' captain-coach Graeme Langlands described Wittenberg in the following terms:

He was very, very tough. He lost half a hand in an accident with farming equipment before he came to Sydney but it didn't worry him. He told me that when he resumed playing after the accident the tops of the finger stumps would bleed during matches. He didn't let it worry him.⁵

The Immortal Reg Gasnier entered the scene during this period. I recall that early in the 1960s, when he first captained Australia, much was made of his distant French heritage. This was also the case with the Australian cricket captain, Richie Benaud.

Manly-Warringah winger Nick Yakich, whose career ended prematurely through injury, was another notable player. Yakich represented NSW in 1965 and was also selected in Australian squad to tour New Zealand, the first Kangaroo of Croatian heritage. Nick's brother Fred also played for Manly as did second-rower Tony Antunac.

My tally of culturally-diverse Kangaroos by 1970 is 38 of 454 or 8.3 per cent, down from 22 of 218, (10 per cent) of Kangaroos from 1908 to 1937. While this suggests a decline from previous levels, anecdotal evidence from club records and programs suggest that rugby league was just as diverse, if not more so, as pre-Second World War levels. However, the diversity in the Australian team had become more significant a few years earlier (1960), when Queensland's Lionel Morgan became the first Aborigine to play for Australia. He was followed by Artie Beetson, Eric Simms, Ron Saddler and George Ambrum. At club level Eric Robinson, Kevin Longbottom, Bruce Olive, Bruce 'Larpa' Stewart, (uncle to the Ella brothers) and Kevin Yow Yeh were prominent.



Meanwhile St George resumed its Pacific experiment by signing giant Fijian forward, Apisai Toga. After two seasons with the Rochdale Hornets (UK), Apisai came to St George in 1968 and was joined by his (equally-gigantic) brother, Inosai the following year. Sadly, Apisai collapsed and died after training one night in 1973 when he suffered tetanus poisoning from an unattended coral injury while visiting Fiji during the off-season.

Changes in the 1970s

The election of the Whitlam Government in 1972 encouraged a new sense of identity and was a strong indication that the winds of change were blowing. Australia's new wave of theatre began with *The Legend of King O'Malley* by Michael Boddy and Bob Ellis and the Australian Council for the Arts provided financial support for the Arts. Sydney's Nimrod Theatre was founded in 1970 as was the Australian Performing Group, based at the Pram Factory in Carlton, Melbourne. Similar small companies presenting new work sprung up around the country: Adelaide had Troupe & Theatre 61; Brisbane, La Boite; and Perth, Hole-in-the-Wall. The Australian National Playwright Conference was established in 1972 and Currency Press, which published new Australian plays, in 1973.

Sydney Opera House opened during this decade as did the Adelaide Festival. The Victorian College of the Arts was established in 1976. Indigenous theatre (in the western sense) began with *Basically Black* (Nimrod 1972) and *The Cherry Pickers* (Kevin Gilbert 1971, Black Theatre Redfern). There were regional companies: Hunter Valley (Castenet Club), Riverina Trucking, Murray River Performing Group (Albury Wodonga), Parramatta Riverside (Castle Hill) and community theatre: Sidetrack made and performed original theatre for migrant and working people in Marrickville and the inner-west. Grahame Bond unleashed *Aunty Jack* and Reg Livermore introduced *Betty Blokk-Buster*. The first Festival of Sydney took place in 1977.

The left-for-dead Australian film industry revived and with support from the Australian Film Commission (1975) flourished. The decade featured *Sunday Too Far Away*, Peter Weir's feature debut *The Cars That Ate Paris* and the haunting *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (for which cinematographer Russell Boyd won a BAFTA), Bruce Beresford's *The Great McCarthy*, *Barry Mckenzie Holds His Own* and *Don's Party*; *Alvin Purple Rides Again*

and Petersen by Tim Burstall. Fred Schepisi's feature debut *The Devil's Playground* and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. *Caddie*, *Storm Boy*, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, *Fourth Wish*, *Picture Show Man* and *Newsfront* (directed by Phil Noyce). *My Brilliant Career* launched the careers of Judy Davis and Gillian Armstrong, while *Mad Max* did likewise for Mel Gibson and George Miller.

Local content requirements also ensured plenty of television production: Crawford's cop shows, serials, mini-series, ABC comedies. *Countdown* premiered on ABC TV. Colour television also arrived. There was plenty of locally produced music, to be played on new community radio stations, as well as the ABC's Triple Jay network.

The first one-day cricket international was played in 1970 when Australia defeated England by five wickets. It was the Chappell era for Australian cricket, spearheaded by Lillee and Thomson. Then the game was transformed by Kerry Packer in 1977. Anti-apartheid riots marked the Springbok rugby tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1971, particularly in Queensland where Premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen declared a state of emergency. Shane Gould won three of Australia's eight gold medals at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games but there were none at Montreal four years later. This 'failure' was a key reason why the Australian Institute of Sport was established in 1981. The Socceroos went to the 1974 World Cup Finals, North Melbourne won its first VFL premierships coached by the legendary Ron Barassi, Mark Edmondson was the last Aussie male to win Australian Tennis Open (in 1976) and Chris O'Neil was the last Aussie female (1978). The Wallabies won the Bledisloe Cup after 30 years.

Ethnic Community Councils were established and Carnivale, the NSW multicultural arts festival, was inaugurated in 1975. Early tests for 'Ethnic Television' (SBS) were conducted.

The sons of the post-War migrants were now to be found in most teams in Sydney rugby league. Tommy Raudonikis and George Peponis in particular symbolised the new era in a more dominant way than had been evident previously. Of course I declare bias, since one of them is from Wagga Wagga and the other is Greek.

The son of a Lithuanian father and a Swiss mother, Tommy Raudonikis was cocky, combative and refused to be beaten by any man. He was an outstanding leader and tough beyond comprehension. He must have



Tommy Raudinikis, the son of a Lithuanian father and a Swiss mother, provided superb service from the scrum base.

been a nightmare to play against. He started with Wagga Kangaroos (1969) before playing 202 games for Western Suburbs and another 37 for the Newtown Jets. First selected for Australia in 1971, he remained first choice for most of the decade and was captain in two Tests of the 1973 Kangaroo tour. He also captained NSW in the inaugural State of Origin contest in 1980. Raudonikis was the perfect protagonist for the 'Fibros' in their class warfare (ingeniously inspired by coach Roy Masters) against the Manly 'Silvertails' (this being the subject of the seventh Tom Brock Lecture). Along with all his other proletarian qualities, Tommy also embodied 'wog pride'.

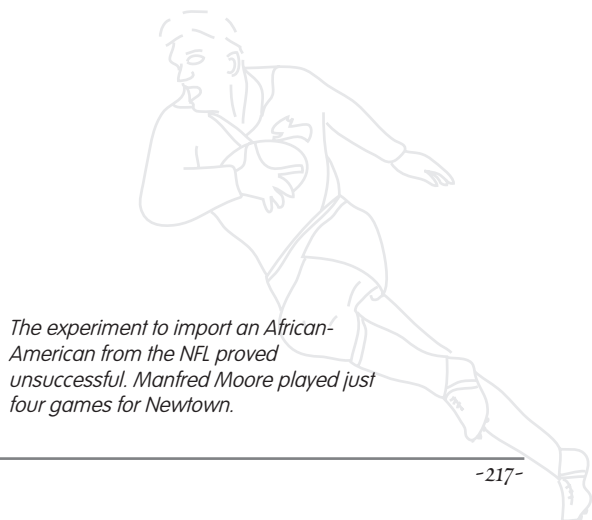
I was also fortunate to enjoy Tommy's career as a coach with the Magpies from a privileged position as ABC's occasional 'Round the Grounds' reporter. One of my duties was to record interviews with the respective coaches and then broadcast them as part of my report. Tommy is an aural delight with a voice like he's had a few smokes, a few beers and eaten the bottles. If Wests had lost, which was not infrequent during those times, Tommy's language was often too 'colourful' for broadcast and I would have my finger poised to 'beep' as we went to air.

The other major 1970s figure was George Peponis, the first player born outside Australia to captain the Australian rugby league team. His family migrated from Tripoli in Greece to Australia when George was an infant. He played rugby union at Canterbury Boys' High School and then league before being graded by Canterbury-Bankstown in 1973, which supported him financially while he studied medicine. Like Tommy, he was also a fierce competitor (albeit less emphatic) and a great leader, with the 1980 premiership and five from five for Australia. But he was

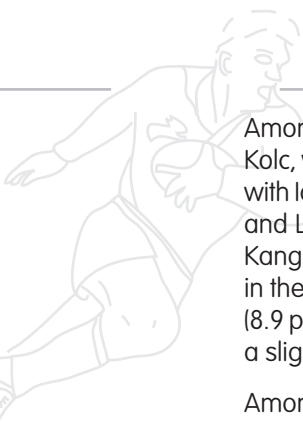
so different from Tommy, that the concept of 'diversity' was apparent to everyone on the new colour television sets. Tommy carried the authority of the street while George carried the authority of the scholar. Peponis also represented another aspect of 'wog pride' and his effect upon the migrant communities in the Canterbury-Bankstown area, particularly the Greek, was immense. Little kids playing and tackling in a game called 'Peponis', signs in Greek: 'Pame Bulldogs', 'Ela, Giatre!' 'ΠΑΜΕ ΜΠΥΛΛΑΝΤΟΓΣ! ΕΛΑ ΓΙΑΤΡΕ!' (Go Bulldogs! Come on, Doc!).

Quite simply, George was the answer to every migrant parent's dream: a doctor and *o kapitanos* of Australia! Except for those of us who had to suffer the comparison, he was the the model Greek-Australian son. The son our parents never had! My father delighted in the conceit that George could both injure and repair a person and that each weekend presented him with 13 prospective patients. He had visions of George bulk billing the opposition, he thought it was a stroke of genius.

George's great rival for the hooking position was Manly's Max Krilich, who led the Sea Eagles to the 1978 premiership when they played six matches in 16 days including the Grand Final replay where they beat Cronulla. Controversially, named as captain of the 1982 Kangaroos, the unassuming Krilich grew into the captaincy blending the best qualities of Raudonikis and Peponis. Under Krilich and coach Frank Stanton that side went on to defeat all before them and are now known as 'the Invincibles'.



The experiment to import an African-American from the NFL proved unsuccessful. Manfred Moore played just four games for Newtown.



Among the other Kangaroos of the 1970s was Parramatta half John Kolc, while the German thread, however slender, remained prominent with Ian Schubert and Queensland forwards Greg Veivers, Nick Geiger and Lew and Greg Platz. Larry Corowa became the sixth Indigenous Kangaroo. The growing numbers of culturally-diverse players show up in the figures. Kangaroo representation at end of 1979 was 47 of 523 (8.9 per cent). There were also six Indigenous players. This represented a slight increase from the 1969 figures (8.3 per cent).

Among notable 1970s club players were Tommy's 'Fibro' compatriot Mick Liubinskas; Parramatta's Sulkowicz brothers, Ed and Ted; New Zealand imports Dane and Kurt Sorenson and Maori Henry Tatana who played for the Bulldogs and inevitably, St George. Greek Peter Peters (aka Zorba) played for Manly. With great invention Newtown recruited Super Bowl winner Manfred Moore, but despite early promise the African American only lasted four games before deciding that the extra padding, particularly the helmet, offered by the National Football League was preferable.

The 1980s

During this decade greater diversity became even more apparent among the Kangaroos. Queensland provided the mandatory German forwards Brad Tessmann and Bryan Niebling and also the distant son of French nobility John Ribot de Bressac, the paradoxically named Italian prop Martin Bella and a Romanian hooker Greg Conescu. From NSW came Eric Grothe and Andrew Ettingshausen (both selected in the 100 Greatest players) the latter providing a different image for German-Australian masculinity. Paul Sironen became the first Finnish-Australian Kangaroo. Our first Lebanese-Australian representative was Sironen's club mate, hooker Benny Elias. Benny was born in Tripoli, a city with the same name as the village of George Peponis's birth. Benny's parents, like George, brought him to Australia at a young age:

Sure, I looked up to George Peponis. But unlike George I started playing halfback. That soon changed because the Aussie coach [at junior club] wanted his son to play in that position. You know what, that turned out to be the best coaching move he made. I ended up playing hooker and I must admit my ethnic background helped me succeed. My parents, like most ethnics, worked hard when they came out here and I could see comparisons with the position I played. I really worked hard at my game, despite the taunts and criticisms I copped in my younger years.⁶



John Ribot de Bressac, the distant son of French nobility, is a study of concentration while kicking.

Elias worked so hard at his game that he transformed the hooking position. It may be too far-fetched to suggest that he was the Adam Gilchrist of the code. Benny provided a significant evolutionary link by taking the halfback's skills into the middle of the pack, and more importantly, into dummy half. As a hooker he was the 'love child' of Tommy and George! He was tough, cunning, abrasive, cocky and tricky and won games and bled memorably for Balmain and NSW. He was also brilliant in rescuing the Ashes on the 1990 tour. I particularly enjoyed his explosive contests at club and Origin levels with Steve and



Newtown player Fred Pagano, a 'tackling machine', had an Italian background.



*Dr George Peponis was
o kapitano of the Australian
rugby league team.*

Kerrod Walters and I eagerly anticipated Balmain-Souths matches. I'm sadly ignorant of the history of relations between Lebanon and Malta, but judging from what happened every time Benny lined up against Mario Fenech, I assume there must be some vicious tribal revenge dispute dating back to the thirteenth century BC. Benny and Mario just couldn't seem to agree on anything. I wish that we had had 'scrum-cam'. The referees were kept busy but must have had many laughs.

Souths, like all clubs by then, had a strong sprinkling of players from diverse backgrounds. Fenech's team mates included Joe Squadrito, Ziggy Niszczot, Bronko Djura, Michael Pobjie and Paul Akkary.

Not only was the game becoming more multicultural, but also more professional and cosmopolitan. The North Sydney Bears for instance, unable to attract or produce enough top locals, developed a strong Kiwi connection that saw Mark Graham, Fred Ah Kuoi, Clayton Friend and the amazing Olsen Filipaina join the club. Saints had huge Tongan front rower John Fifita, while England's Martin Offiah (of Nigerian descent) had his first season in Australia with the Roosters. Ellery Hanley took turns with both Tigers and Magpies.

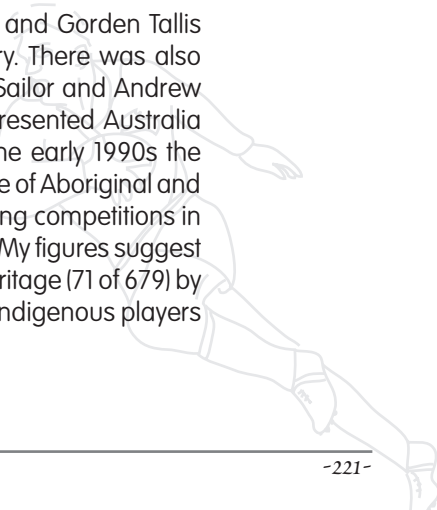
Indigenous Kangaroos of the decade included Queenslanders Colin Scott, Dale Shearer, Tony Currie and Sam Backo, along with Steve Ella and John Ferguson from NSW. The legendary Mal Meninga was a Solomon Islander. I have calculated that 55 of the 599 Kangaroos until 1989, 9.2 per cent came from non-British-Irish backgrounds and Indigenous players, in addition, comprised 2.1 per cent. I suspect that a proper analysis of club playing staff during the 1980s would reflect a higher level of cultural diversity.

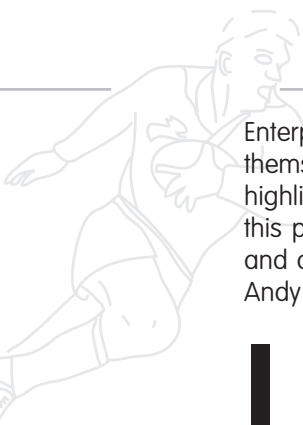
The 1990s

The diversity of the Kangaroos further increased during the 1990s with at least another 13 players of mixed heritage as well as a further seven Indigenous players being capped. From Queensland came Paul Hauff, Mark Hohn, Trevor Gillmeister, Gary Larson (of Swedish descent) and the quintessential German Queenslander, Shane Webcke. NSW provided Glenn Lazarus, Jim Serdaris, Nik Kosef, Michael Buettner, Michael Vella (possibly the first Maltese-Australian Test player) and Jason Stevens. The latter may seem an anomaly in terms of names, but does serve to highlight one of the obvious flaws of my system, which ignores cultural heritage on the maternal side. Jason Stevens was raised by his mother and her parents, the Papadopoulos family. Likewise Craig Gower, who represented Australia in the Super League Anzac Test, has an Italian mother. He later switched codes and countries and played Test rugby for Italy against Australia in 2009. I expect there are similar players of whose maternal influence I am completely ignorant.

It is also worth noting the appearances of Jim Dymock and John Hopoate in the 1990s, as well as Solomon Haumono, who also represented Australia in the Super League international in 1997. The three are of Tongan descent and their appearances mark the beginning of a trend that has become more prominent in the present day, as more Tongan and other Pacific Islanders find their way into the NRL. Families from those islands traditionally travelled west for better employment opportunities. Whereas previously they had stopped in New Zealand, some have travelled further west and settled in Australia since the 1980s. Tongan communities have been established in Sydney's south-west, providing fertile breeding grounds for NRL players.

Indigenous representatives included Laurie Daley and Gordon Tallis who emulated Beeson by captaining their country. There was also Cliff Lyons, Craig Salvatori, Steve Renouf, Wendell Sailor and Andrew Walker, while Ken Nagas and David Peachey represented Australia in the Super League Anzac Test of 1997. During the early 1990s the NSWRL (as NRL then was) had the highest percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants of all major sporting competitions in Australia (including the Australian Football League). My figures suggest just over 10 per cent of Kangaroos to be of mixed heritage (71 of 679) by the end of the decade. There were, in addition, 22 Indigenous players (3.2 per cent).





Enterprising clubs like the Bulldogs, not surprisingly, started to market themselves to the various communities, by staging ‘multicultural days’, highlighting the diversity within their area and team. The architect of this plan was Lyn Anderson, then marketing manager at Bulldogs, and daughter of legendary ‘Bullfrog’ Peter Moore. Jim Serdaris told Andy Paschalidis:

I grew up in the Canterbury area and I found that there had been an increase in the awareness of Rugby League when different players of ethnic background came through the ranks. The Lebanese people, in particular, are fanatical. It was a problem for Canterbury when they moved to Parramatta Stadium. The ethnic communities in the district didn’t like the move and it showed in the [lower] crowd figures.

Like many of my mates I was under pressure to play soccer ... As a kid I must admit I got called ‘wog’ lots of times but I found it worked in your favour because it made you play better.⁷

The new millennium

During the first eight years of the new millennium there have been a further 30 new Kangaroos from culturally diverse backgrounds, with Pacific Islanders becoming increasingly prominent. Lote Tuqiri, Petro Cioniceva and Jarryd Hayne have Fijian backgrounds while Willie Mason, Richard Villasanti, Willie Tonga, Brent Kite, Anthony Tupou, Antonio Kaufusi and Israel Folau have Tongan antecedents. Reni Maitua emanates from Samoa, a background he shares with Karmichael Hunt who also claims Cook Islander heritage. Timana Tahu and Tonie Carroll (who also played for New Zealand) have Maori heritage.

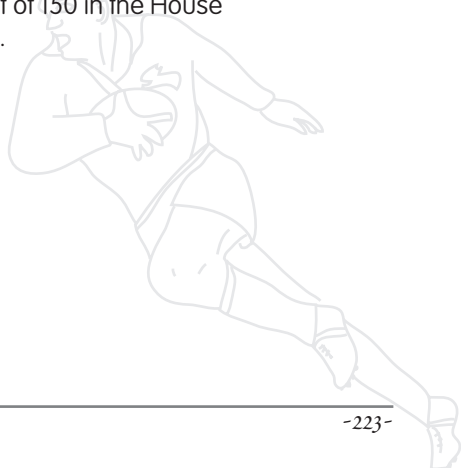
There have also been some prominent non-Islander players. Hazem El Masri, born in the same city (Tripoli) as Benny Elias, emigrated from Lebanon with his family as an adolescent. He switched from soccer to rugby league, eventually joining the Bulldogs where he created many NRL and Bulldogs point-scoring records. El Masri is a devout Muslim, the first to represent Australia in rugby league. Rabbit and Rooster Craig Wing is the first Chinese-Australian (possibly via the Philippines) Kangaroo. Mention should also be made of Chris McKenna, Queenslander, son of an Anglo father and non-Anglo mother (Portuguese?). Braith Anasta has a Greek background.

The new Indigenous 'Roos included as usual some outstanding outside backs, but also playmakers such as Scott Prince and Johnathan Thurston and forward Sam Thaiday. This is a possible indication that some of the 'positional segregation', found in an American study 20 years ago, may be breaking down.⁸

So, by my reckoning, the final tally of players from non-British-Irish backgrounds is 92 out of 743 (12.3 per cent), plus 30 Indigenous players (4 per cent) for a total of 16 per cent and rising. A similar trend is probably evident in Australian rugby union. (*Rugby League's 100 Greatest Players* were chosen by 130 experts including 13 non-Anglo and Indigenous players). However, the figure is lower than the estimates of non-Anglo Australians in the general population: 25 to 30 per cent, with 25 per cent overseas-born, and 20 per cent reported to speak languages other than English at home.

The most likely reason for this is the lack of engagement with rugby league by the large Asian communities as well as Latin-American and emerging African communities, all of whom look to soccer rather than rugby league for social and sporting networks. Indeed, this still remains the football of choice for the majority of young European Australians. Traditional inner-city junior competitions have dwindled as other new areas flourish.

Sixteen per cent of the Kangaroos is also much lower than my straw poll of 2008 NRL players as provided by official club websites. NRL 2008: 413 players, 94 Maori/Pacific Island (22.7 per cent), NESB 37 (8.9 per cent), Indigenous 30 (7.2 per cent) making a total of 161 non-Anglo or 39 per cent. Obviously, these figures show the enormous impact of the Maori and Pacific Islanders on the contemporary game. Nevertheless, 16 per cent is higher than the non-Anglo representation in our Federal Parliament: 34 out of 226 (15 per cent) with 24 out of 150 in the House of Representatives and 10 out of 76 in the Senate.





The Rugby League World Cup

Before concluding I'd like to talk briefly about the Rugby League World Cup, a competition which has struggled for decades as it has tried to develop the game in other countries. I have fond memories of it, ever since the 1957 French team played a warm-up match in Wagga (cockerel blazer patch). Recent cups have shown some interesting developments which add further insight into the nature of rugby league in Australia.

In an attempt to revitalise the tournament and to celebrate England's centenary in the code, the competition expanded to ten teams in 1995, including South Africa, Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa and Papua New Guinea. There were another seven teams in an 'Emerging Nations' World Cup.

The twelfth Rugby League World Cup in 2000 expanded to 16 nations. The teams included Russia (which featured Ian Rubin from Souths and Easts), Cook Islands, Scotland, Ireland, Lebanon, New Zealand Maori and Samoa. The Cup has been reduced to ten teams in 2008, with qualifying rounds throughout Europe and the Pacific.

Interestingly, Lebanon and some of the European countries (Malta, Greece) have had their teams established by Australians before being able to supply domestic players. Lebanon missed out on the finals this time with a team coached by Darren Maroon (ex-Bulldog), captained by Hazem El Masri and including Frank Samia (from St George-Illawarra), Danny Chiha (Windsor), George Ndaira (Souths). Previous coaches and players include John Elias, Joe Thomas and Hassan Saleh.

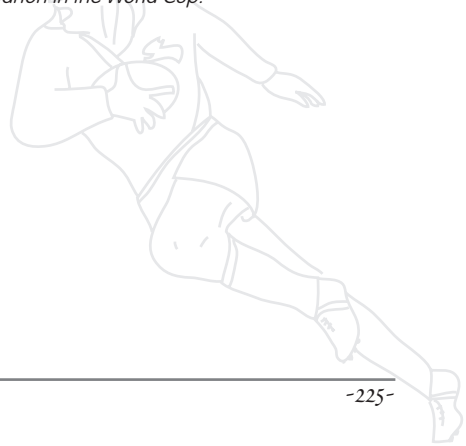
Michael Vella, Roosters prop Shane Shackleton and Penrith's Jarrod Sammut have played for Malta at international level. Sydney-born Nick Zisti played for several NRL clubs during 1990s, and represented Italy in both rugby codes. The Greek side was coached and captained by former NRL players Steve Georgallis (Dutch mother) and John Skandalis and current Bulldog Nick Kouparitsas recently debuted for Greece, along with several other NRL and lower-grade players. There was even an Andy Marinos from Zimbabwe who played for the Bulldogs in 1990s before returning to rugby and representing Wales. He has just recently been appointed managing director of South African Rugby.

In the 2008 Rugby League World Cup 72 of the 240 players (30 per cent) played in the NRL. There were other players drawn from the metropolitan and regional competitions. Australian-based players contributed the following numbers to World Cup sides: Australia 24, New Zealand 23, Tonga 17, Samoa, 11, Fiji 9, PNG 7, Scotland 4 and Ireland 1. While the World Cup showcases the diversity of the NRL and rugby league—with 52 out of the 72 NRL players (72 per cent) from non-Anglo background—it is also a reminder of the weakness of the code outside Australia. Among Australia's new caps are Anthony Laffranchi and Terry Campese, whose uncle David, the rugby genius, was notorious for bringing the game into repute.

This diversity ranges across all echelons of the game. The Greek community for instance have provided coaches, such as Phil Economidis (Gold Coast) and Arthur Kitinas (Souths), as well as club presidents, Nick Pappas (Souths), Nick Politis (Roosters) and George Peponis (Bulldogs). So far I am not aware of any Greek referees, which is surprising considering I've never heard a Greek yet who couldn't do a better job.



St George-Illawarra player Frank Samia represented Lebanon in the World Cup.





Diversity and the future of the game?

Finally, what does this diversity mean for the future of the game? Given the professionalism and the way the game is now played with the emphasis on size, strength and speed the continual development of Islander players is certain, as they are just as much in demand in English Super League and professional rugby. Likewise, the overrepresentation of Indigenous players seems likely to remain and perhaps even increase. But if League is to survive it will need to do even more work within the other diverse communities (particularly the Asian, African and Latin American communities) as the competition for junior players is intense among football codes and other sports.

Crowds remain modest at many club games and Australia's dominance at international level has made for too many lopsided Tests in a sport that has such a small global footprint. Nevertheless, the 2008 World Cup was shown on television in 128 countries. This may create some interest but whether the international body can generate enough finance to undertake intense and meaningful development with smaller European affiliates remains doubtful. Australian (British and New Zealand as well) players should continue to be encouraged to play for their country of heritage. Perhaps some cultural exchange could take place.

I was interested to hear Matthew Johns last weekend talking about the future of the game and suggesting the inclusion of a team from Papua New Guinea in the NRL, similar to the Warriors.⁹ There have already been several fine players from that nation: Adrian Lam (Easts player and coach), thrilling Storm winger Marcus Bai, Michael Bani of the Sea Eagles, Neville Costigan at the Broncos and Raiders. Johns's idea makes good sense.

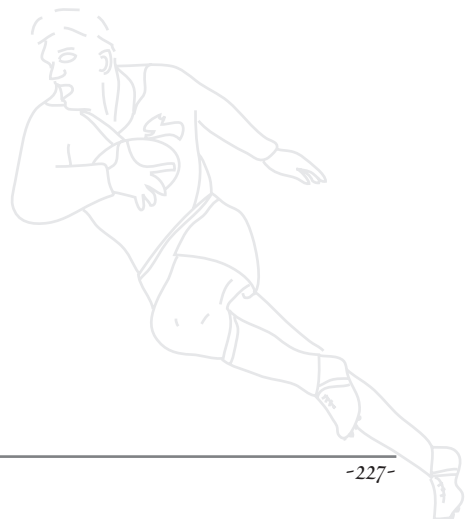
I also note with interest that the Victorian Rugby League has appointed former Melbourne Storm player Matt Rua (of Cook Island heritage) as Multicultural and Indigenous Development Officer, to liaise with key groups such as the Victorian Aboriginal Youth and Sport Association (VAYSA).

All such initiatives are welcome and hopefully they will all be constructive in strengthening the code in the future. However, I believe the biggest challenge the League faces is to re-establish its connection with its 'community', whatever we may think that word means. For me, it

means the sense of inclusion into a microcosm that reflects the wider dynamic society that is Australia. Writer Angelo Loukakis recalled what it was like growing up in Leichhardt in the 1960s and the euphoria of Balmain's last title:

Despite their decided disadvantages, occasionally, very occasionally, the unlikely lads would come good—as they did finally after decades of being on the outer, and to their eternal honour and glory, in 1969. If because of your unpropitious ethnic background, or possibly the fact that you were a person of the female persuasion, you were denied the immediate involvement which comes from playing the game yourself, there were still times when Rugby League stopped being something which happened 'out there', times when all the barriers came down and you too became part of the whole damn thing, and when you were able to directly experience something as central to the game as the joy of victory. That was what winning really meant that year, especially for those of us who normally felt on the outer—a distinct sense of being a part of it, of being included.¹⁰

If rugby league can find a way to regenerate that feeling among the youth of our diverse communities, it will go a long way towards securing its future. Without strong grassroots support and participation, the game will be unsustainable at the elite level. There are more than 100 languages spoken in Australia and rugby league (like all our major sports) must learn to communicate in all of them.





Notes:

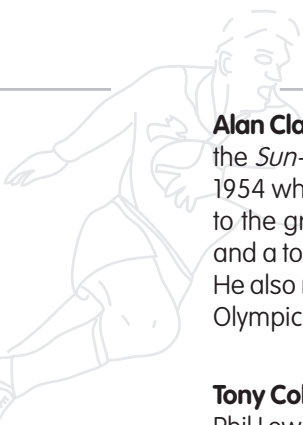
- 1, 2 Sean Fagan, 'Herb Steinohrt: The Gentle Clydesdale', RL1908, <http://www.rl1908.com/Legends/Steinohrt.htm>, accessed 1 Oct. 2008; Fagan, "'George" Anlezark: A Forgotten Pioneer', RL1908, <http://www.rl1908.com/Legends/Anlezark.htm>, accessed 1 Oct. 2008.
- 3 Anthony Hughes, 'Muscular Judaism and the Jewish Rugby League Competition in Sydney, 1924-27', *Sporting Traditions*, vol 13, no 1, Nov. 1996, pp. 61–80.
- 4 James Bradley, 'Inventing Australians and Constructing Englishness: Cricket and the Creation of a National Consciousness, 1860-1914', *Sporting Traditions*, vol. 11, no 2, May 1995, pp. 35–60.
- 5 'History of St George', http://www.showroom.com.au/dragons/dragonshistory/history_players_wxyz.htm, accessed 1 October 2008.
- 6 Quoted in Andy Paschalidis, 'Pies, Souvlaki and Yeeros', in David Headon and Lex Marinos (eds), *League of a Nation*, ABC Books, Sydney, 1996, p. 159.
- 7 Paschalidis, 'Pies, Souvlaki and Yeeros', p. 158.
- 8 Christopher J. Hallinan, 'Aborigines and Positional Segregation in Australian Rugby League', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, vol. 26, no. 2, 1991, pp. 69-79.
- 9 *Grandstand*, ABC Radio (Sydney), 1 Nov. 2008.
- 10 Angelo Loukakis, 'Balmain Tigers', Headon and Marinos, *League of a Nation*, pp. 79–80.

Biographies of Tom Brock Lecturers

Andrew Moore is an Associate Professor of history at the University of Western Sydney. He has written four books, three on the history of right-wing politics in Australia and one on the social history of sport (*The Mighty Bears! A Social History of North Sydney Rugby League*, Macmillan, 1996), as well as more than 70 articles in books and scholarly journals. He is chair of the Tom Brock Bequest Committee. With Andy Carr in 2008 he edited *Centenary Reflections: 100 Years of Rugby League in Australia* (ASSH Studies 25) and has contributed articles on rugby league to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Manic Times*, and the rugby league fanzine *Loosehead*. Despite their diminished profile in the subsidiary NSW Cup, he continues to support the North Sydney Bears and still attends home games at the best rugby league oval in the world.

Ian Heads OAM was taken by two uncles to the Ashes-deciding Australia-Great Britain Test at the SCG when aged seven and the experience of that muddy day perhaps provided the spark for what was to come. He soon became a keen Eastern Suburbs (Tricolours) supporter. A fledgling career in journalism grew to become a career in sportswriting—and especially rugby league. Ian wrote for the *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraphs* from 1964–80 becoming chief league writer for the papers from 1969–80 before entering the world of magazines (Managing Editor *Rugby League Week*, 1981–8). From 1988 he wrote, solely and as a co-author, many books on some of the game's leading figures: Peter Sterling, Wayne Pearce, Jack Gibson (four books), Frank Hyde, Noel Kelly, Malcolm Reilly, Arthur Beetson, Benny Elias, George Piggins, Ken Arthurson, Shane Webcke (two books). His major works include *The Kangaroos*, *True Blue* and *A Centenary of Rugby League* (with David Middleton in 2008).

One of Australia's most eminent playwrights, **Alex Buzo** was born in Sydney in 1944 and educated at the University of New South Wales. He wrote many plays, including *Norm and Ahmed*, *Macquarie*, *Big River*, *Makassar Reef*, *Coralie Lansdowne Says No* and *Pacific Union: The Story of the San Francisco Forty-Fivers*, in which the central character is the former Patron of the New South Wales Rugby League, Dr H.V. Evatt. Alex Buzo's books included *Kiwese*, *Prue Flies North*, *A Dictionary of the Almost Obvious* and *The Longest Game* (co-edited with Jamie Grant). In 1973 he received the Gold Medal from the Australian Literature Society and in 1998 the Alumni Award from The University of New South Wales. Alex died in 2006.



Alan Clarkson OAM was the chief writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Sun-Herald* from 1967 to 1989, having worked on both papers from 1954 when he had the privilege of being the second string league writer to the great Tom Goodman. Alan Clarkson covered five Kangaroo tours and a tour of New Zealand in 1969 and the World Cup in England in 1970. He also reported on three Olympic Games, including the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games and covered other sports such as tennis and swimming.

Tony Collins' earliest sporting memories involve watching Roger Millward, Phil Lowe and Balmain's Bob Smithies play for Hull Kingston Rovers in the early 1970s. Today, he is Professor of History at the Leeds Metropolitan University, England. Collins is the author of *Rugby's Great Split*, a social history of the 1895 rugby split, *Mud, Sweat and Beers* (with Wray Vamplew), about sport's relationship with alcohol, and the forthcoming *Rugby League in Twentieth Century Britain*. He is also archivist of the British Rugby Football League.

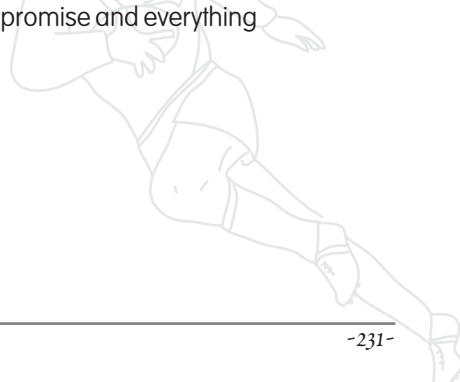
Thomas Keneally AO is an acclaimed novelist with an output of more than 40 published works. He won the Booker prize for *Schindler's Ark* in 1982, which later became a film. He was twice winner of the Miles Franklin Award in 1967 (*Bring Larks and Heroes*) and 1968 (*Three Cheers for the Paraclete*). Keneally is the number one ticket holder with the Manly Sea Eagles and biographer of its coach, Des Hasler. He recently commented that his three loves were 'family, writing and football'. He expressed a love for rugby league because 'it's a model of life ... for politics, love, territory, fraternity, everything else'.

Roy Masters became a journalist with the *Sydney Morning Herald* and a television and radio commentator following careers as a schoolteacher and coach of leading rugby league teams, Wests and St George. He was the first coach of the Australian Schoolboys' team, which was undefeated on its 1972 tour of England. Masters is also an inaugural member of the Board of the Australian Sports Commission. Masters later expanded the subject material of the Tom Brock lecture when he published *Bad Boys* in 2006.

Professor David Rowe is the Director of the Centre for Cultural Research (CCR) at the University of Western Sydney. His research and consultancy work has been funded by many public and private organisations, including the New South Wales Ministry for the Arts, the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services, the European Science Foundation (Social Sciences), and the Australian Research Council. David has many academic publications on media and popular culture, and his work has been translated into Chinese, Arabic, French and Turkish. His most recent books are the co-authored *Globalization and Sport: Playing the World* (2001); *Sport, Culture and the Media: The Unruly Trinity* (second edition, 2004) and *Critical Readings: Sport, Culture and the Media* (2004). Professor Rowe is also a frequent commentator on social and cultural matters in the print, electronic and online media.

Sean Fagan is a sports historian and writer. He is responsible for the RL1908.com website on rugby league history, and its 19th-century rugby union equivalent, ColonialRugby.com.au. His 2005 book *The Rugby Rebellion: The Divide of League and Union*, explored the initial split between the rugby codes in Australia. It was re-issued in 2007 as *The Rugby Rebellion: The Pioneers of Rugby League*. His most recent book is *The Master: The Life and Times of Dally Messenger*. Sean Fagan is a member of the Rugby League Centenary Historians Committee, and contributes articles on rugby league history to various newspapers and magazines.

Lex Marinos OAM was born in Wagga Wagga into a family of Greek café owners. After achieving a BA with Honours in Drama from UNSW, he worked in various areas of the entertainment industry as an actor, director, writer and broadcaster. Awarded OAM for his services to the performing arts, he was Director of Carnivale, Sydney's multicultural festival, from 1996 to 1999. Lex Marinos has reported on rugby league for ABC radio and co-edited with David Headon *League of a Nation* in 1996, an anthology of rugby league writing. He was a member of the Gurwood St Primary School four stone seven team, which won a premiership in 1960. 'Sadly', Lex commented, 'I failed to fulfil that early sporting promise and everything since then has been an anti-climax'.







*A dapper Tom Brock, aged 37,
at Redfern Oval*

