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A LITTLE more than a year ago, *Inside Sport* made its first foray into the podcast world, a rugby league-themed show named *Dead In Goal*. It was hatched by our resident league nut James Smith with then-online editor Anthony Brand, and James remains the driving force behind the pod today, having cultivated a devoted audience of NRL fans who wanted something other than the negativity that passes for the sport's weekly discourse.

If you've never listened to *Dead In Goal* – or never clicked on a podcast at all – we enthusiastically invite you to give it a try. For one thing, if you're reading this magazine, we think you'll find it worthwhile. The reason that podcasting has dovetailed neatly with outlets that deal in the written word is how the format lends itself to so many of the same virtues – unlike the formal structures of radio, podcasts encourage a loose-yet-deep inquiry that have the same kind of feel as the best long-form pieces.

So with rugby league's annual spotlight moment arriving once again with *State of Origin*, the magazine decided to run a preview, *Dead In Goal*-style. With Smith and yours truly now serving as hosts of the show, we dove into our *Origin* obsessions: what got us into the nation's best sporting rivalry, what we're looking forward to in this year's series, calling out to our savvy band of listeners to answer a question about *Origin* eligibility, and our novel theory about why Queensland needs a Bat-signal in the shape of Alfie Langer's head.

The podcast dovetails neatly with the written word, because the format lends itself to so many of the same virtues as the best longform.

It's that kind of show. For the more conventional *Inside Sport* treatment of this year's *Origin*, we also have our cover story on NSW captain Boyd Cordner, a player seemingly cut from the Blues' cloth. We also have Brad Fittler in conversation about how he thinks his first *Origin* as a coach will go. It will come as no surprise that Freddie is rather cool about it all – now there's a guy who would like the podcast format.

IN ADDITION to the trans-Tweed intramural this month: on the AFL front, we profile Richmond star Alex Rance, the best defender in the game. While he's a consummate footballer, he also has a view of the world that encompasses much more, which we learned about in our interview.

Football's World Cup is also fast approaching, and we begin our coverage over the next few editions with John Davidson's piece on a key Socceroo, Trent

Sainsbury. He's typical of many of the players who will represent the nation in Russia – someone capable of becoming a much bigger name when his moment on football's biggest stage comes around.

Lastly this month, we announce the winners of *The Clubbies*, the magazine's community sports awards. Now in its third year, we saw the awards enjoy a significant leap in entries, and confirmed yet again that some of the best stories emerge out of sporting grassroots.

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Villain To Hero

MELBOURNE VICTORY'S PRODIGAL SON TERRY ANTONIS THOUGHT HE'D ENDED HIS SIDE'S FINALS CAMPAIGN. BUT THE A-LEAGUE IS A FUNNY COMP ...

The Sydney FC faithful was in full voice throughout the A-League semi-final at Allianz Stadium, as the front-running Sky Blues continued their quest for a highly anticipated second-straight A-League title.

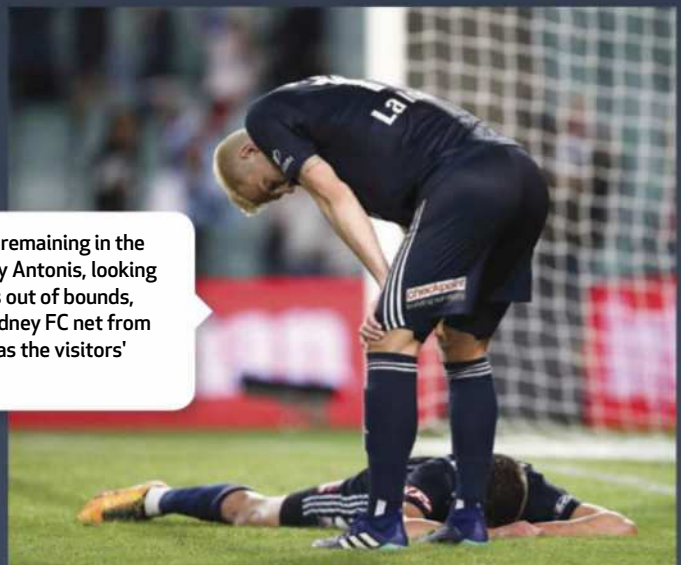


Early in the second half of the 46th Big Blue derby, James Troisi silenced the home crowd when he knocked in an easy goal from clear space to put the Victory ahead 2-1.



Deep into extra-time, Antonis redeemed his early mistake by charging from the halfway line, avoiding several lunges from Sydney FC defenders, before snapping home a screamer. He was appropriately mobbed by Victory's travelling fans.

With just 13 seconds of regulation time remaining in the tense and thrilling match, Victory's Terry Antonis, looking to tap a short and light Sydney FC cross out of bounds, horrifyingly skewed the ball into the Sydney FC net from the side of his shin for an own goal. It was the visitors' second such blunder of the night ...



Sydney FC coach Graham Arnold could only sit and watch ... and wait for someone to wake him up from his nightmare finish to an ultra-successful 2017-18 A-League season.





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20

things you might've missed

1 It seems the main takeaway from Gold Coast's Commonwealth Games is that, yes, you can screw up a closing ceremony bad enough that the television commentators will start criticising it (either that, or don't mess with something Johanna Griggs takes seriously). Instead, we'll always remember the best name to emerge from these Games, Lesotho distance runner Toka Badboy.



2 Russell Crowe, sports memorabilia fanatic. Who knew? As the Hollywood star went about decluttering after his divorce, he put a bunch of sporting artefacts up for auction. Some were really good, including Bert Oldfield's baggy green from the Bodyline series, complete with the broken peak from where Harold Larwood broke it.

3 AFL website reports GWS would rather be known primarily as GIANTS (all caps!). Then Grant Thomas says the players are "a bunch of big heads" who are "more interested in how they look".



4 Fresh off not being able to identify Cronulla as the Sharks, former Queensland premier-turned-NRL chairman Peter Beattie picks out a Barcelona shirt-wearing kid during a TV interview and asks him if he's a Newcastle Knights fan. If this were politics, a staffer should be getting fired ...

5 A literal giant of the commentary box, Darrell Eastlake, is dead at 75. State of Origin's enduring success owed more than a little to Eastlake's memorable calls, which came to define the good-bloke style of sports commentary. Eastlake had the rarest gift for a sports TV talker – he could make anything he was commentating sound dramatic and exciting, which is why his best stuff could be heard on broadcasts of 500cc motorbike races, surf lifesaving or, perhaps best of all, weightlifting.

6 English officials propose a 100-ball cricket format. Because, you know, T20 is just too slow. The new game, still in need of a catchy name ("The Hundred" isn't going to cut it), would have 15 six-ball overs and a final ten-ball over, which have to all be full tosses. (Guess which part of that we made up?)

7 Lance Armstrong reaches a US\$5m settlement with the US government in their fraud lawsuit. The feds had pursued the disgraced cyclist, who was liable for cheating taxpayers along with his regular cheating as he rode for a team sponsored by the US post office. Armstrong had stood to lose \$100m in damages, but he still sounded hard done by even after getting off cheaper: "I rode my heart out for the Postal cycling team."



8 In real end-of-an era stuff, Arsene Wenger is out as manager of Arsenal. This one was coming, but after 22 years, in which Wenger was as responsible as anyone for changing the face of the English Premier League's champion teams, the Frenchman's departure is significant. Wrote Gunners uber-fan Nick Hornby: "If you're over a certain age, the Golden Age of Arsene only seems like yesterday, but my sons and their friends are fed up of hearing about what a 68-year-old man did a decade or more ago."

9 A study finds that ACL injuries are up 70 percent in young people over the last 15 years, thanks mainly to football and netball. In other study news, fewer than 20 percent of Aussie kids are getting the daily required activity time outdoors. Is it because of the knee reconstructions, or the fear of them?



10 Surely because he's thinking a lot about how he'll have to use his pardon power, Donald Trump floats the idea that he'll issue one for boxing great Jack Johnson. The first black heavyweight champ ran afoul of a racist federal law in 1912 that prohibited transporting a woman across state lines for "immoral purposes". While solidly in the category of "the president has better uses of his time", you also have to worry about the provenance of this idea – Trump says he got it from Sylvester Stallone.

11 Port president David Koch accuses the AFL of mishandling its investigation into a nightclub incident involving the Power's Sam Powell-Pepper. Kochie accused the brass of "railroading a kid and trying to rebuild their reputation with women because of the misdemeanours of their own former executives".

12 The English are prepared to sell off Wembley. Shahid Khan, the Pakistani-born American who became a billionaire by inventing the one-piece bumper, has offered £1b for the stadium. Khan also owns the NFL's Jacksonville Jaguars (also Fulham), which set off speculation about American football's design on London. Elements of English football wondered if the FA would flog off one of the three lions, but they stood to get a half-billion pound funds injection.



13 The IAAF announced it would adopt new limits on testosterone levels for female runners competing in events from the 400m to the mile. Smacking of the archaic practice of gender testing, the new rules were also attacked as unscientific. Most of all, they seemed primarily focused on an individual athlete – South African star and dual Comm Games gold medal-winner Caster Semenya, who was admirably blithe about it all, tweeting out: "I'm 97 percent sure you don't like me, but I'm 100 percent sure I don't care."

14 Andrew Bogut signs with the Sydney Kings, in a lift for the NBL. Bogut's deal also ruled out exit clauses back to the US or Europe, which means the NBA champion and former no.1 draft pick will be committed to the local hoops league.



15 An independent review finds that lower-level tennis is rife with match-fixing, describing it as a "tsunami". The review criticised in particular the deal that sold the ITF's live data rights in 2012, which coincided with an explosion in unusual betting patterns at the Futures level. According to the European betting watchdog, since 2015, tennis had been responsible for more suspicious betting than any other sport.

16 Brazil's Rodrigo Koxa wins an award for biggest wave ever surfed, a 24m ball last November off Portugal. Briton Andrew Cotton wins wipeout of the year, but isn't around to claim the award, as he is still recovering from broken vertebrae from the fall.

17 South Sydney under-20s player Jordan Mailata is selected in the NFL draft, pick no.233 to the reigning champions Philadelphia. Mailata has never played in an organised game, instead leaving rugby league to go to a four-month intensive training program in Florida. It's not hard to see what the Eagles were enticed by: Mailata stands at 203cm and 156kg.



18 Always get a kick out of Red Bull F1 boss Christian Horner officially being referred to as "team principal". Thus, Daniel Ricciardo and Max Verstappen were surely sent to the principal's office after cancelling each other out in a crash in the Azerbaijan GP. Horner was incensed: "They are both in the doghouse ... they will be in the factory to apologise to all of the staff."

19 Peter Norman, Aussie sprinter and third man on the stand in that famous moment next to the protesting Americans Tommie Smith and John Carlos in the Mexico City Olympics of 1968, receives a posthumous order of merit from the Australian Olympic Committee. AOC boss John Coates denies that the organisation had wronged Norman: "But I absolutely think we've been negligent in not recognising the role he played back then."



20 Forget who's going to be in the XI; the real action in cricket selection is in the commentary teams for Fox Sports and Ten. The first shot has been fired, with the announcement that Adam Gilchrist will be Fox's lead face – do we finally have our new Richie, here?

Freeze Frame



PHOTO BY Getty Images

▶ If this were the Renaissance, they would paint frescoes like this. Demon Max Gawn was a subject of attention as Melbourne played Essendon.



► This is what you do when you win the title in the Bundesliga, apparently. Juan Bernat led his Bayern teammates in victory after their win over Augsburg secured, well, whatever that circle is ...



▼ The Brisbane Roar's Fahid Ben Khalfallah kicks at some kind of round thing – the ball or Oliver Bozanic's head.



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▲ Corner post chronicles, no.1: the Rabbitohs' Braidon Burns gets this one down while the rest of him is going out.

◀ Corner post chronicles, no.2: Dragon Jason Nightingale pops up a lot in these shots, usually in success - but not this time, taken into touch by the Roosters.



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◀ Above the water, and the rest: Briton Adam Peaty is the boss of the breaststroke, confirming that again at the Comm Games.

▶ Common view of Red Bull's Max Verstappen for the rest of the F1 field - in his wake. But sparks really flew when he and Daniel Ricciardo got together ...

▼ In sync: Japan's Yumi Adachi splashed out at the FINA Artistic Swimming Japan Open in Tokyo, finishing second in the mixed duet category with partner Atsushi Abe.



X-T20
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▲ The doubles pair of Simone Bolelli and Fabio Fognini could have been modelling for clay sculptures as they took on the Bryan brothers in Monte Carlo.

◀ Cavalier disregard: seemingly ageless, LeBron James continued to wreck anything daring to stand in his way during this NBA season.

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Against your rival, it's always real

BY FOX FOOTY'S DERMOTT BRERETON

Hawthorn versus Essendon has become one of the AFL's great modern rivalries, emerging out of the 1980s heyday of the two sides, through to the infamous "line in the sand" game in 2004. Whatever the fortunes of the two clubs at any point in time, the feeling between them hasn't changed – I've had teammates ring me up after the Hawks have lost to the Bombers and say, "Don't they know what it means to lose to them?"

Hawthorn-Essendon was one of those rivalries built on the field. We played them in three grand finals in a row, which in the history of our game is exceptionally rare. During that time, we were fairly evenly matched – although they were a better side by '85 before a fall from grace, and we improved again.

It was an era that was less policed than now, so it was kind of brutal. You were always looking for a one-up. The only thing you could do is up the ante in the physical stakes. You're always giving your best effort to win, no matter the opposition. But against Essendon, you didn't just go out and play – you went out to play and protect yourself at the same time. I will say there was a deep-grained disdain, but also a healthy respect. I saw former Essendon coach Kevin Sheedy the other day, when we were shooting a promotion. He was sharing a light-hearted joke: "We had to get Dean Wallis, had to get Roger Merrett, had to get Mark Harvey, all these rotten mongrels playing for me because we had to combat you, Dipper and Ayres."

It was meant as a rib-tickler for me, but there was an essence of truth. For the supporters, they like to say "this is one of our greatest rivals". Do they mean it? Some might. But for us, the blokes who played and lived through it, it's real.

I think there would be players now who go to their clubs and they're told they have a rivalry with a certain opposition, and they might even feel that the rivalry is contrived. Of the 100 or so players who are drafted or come off the rookie list every year, 70 percent of them come from the TAC Cup. They all know each

other – played in each other's backyards growing up, literally, so it's all, "How are you going, mate?"

Contrast this to the old days of recruitment zones, where you had your part of the city plus another area. You grew up as a footballer in a smaller circle, and there was a band-of-brothers loyalty in that. These days, they try to teach it into the players once they get to the club – "play for each other" and "this is for the jumper" and all that. Players are also moved on fairly quickly, more readily than 25 years ago.

I do, however, get the distinct feeling that footballers in this day and age are terribly loyal to

their employer. If their employer has them at the football club, you are expected to give everything. And in 99.9 percent of cases, it's delivered.

And the best thing about rivalries is, when those games come around, you know the players will be delivering. Everyone is up for the game, which means you can throw out the form line. When you have a familiar rival, you know what they're capable of – but you also are fully aware of what you can do, and you remember the last time you gave them the most of your abilities. When there's a real rivalry game, you can forget about everything else and believe in yourself.

Hawthorn-Essendon was one of those rivalries built on the field. We played them in three grand finals in a row, which in the history of our game is exceptionally rare.



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Unpredictable season, meet rep period

BY FOX LEAGUE'S HANNAH HOLLIS

Forget everything you know about rugby league in 2018. This season is re-writing the rule book. If you're like me, you're already chasing your tips in the office comp. After the opening rounds, I'm relying on golden-point magic and upsets amid this topsy-turvy competition, but it's hard to tell what an upset looks like anymore.

I expected teams such as the Cowboys and Parramatta to make the grand final, but they were sitting somewhere closer to last on the ladder. All three Queensland teams find themselves out of the top eight. Can someone wake me up when we've got answers to this madness?

Jokes aside, this year has proven that anything can happen in the NRL.

When I put my top eight together in January, I had North Queensland taking on the Melbourne Storm in a grand final rematch. I had Parramatta as the minor premiers and the Wests Tigers finishing last.

How about those Tigers? Ivan Cleary has done what all coaches wish they could do and what few coaches actually can: build a club culture that sees a team of rag-tag players believing in each other and working together to play above themselves. The Tigers proved their opening-round victory over the Roosters was no fluke when they schooled the reigning premier Storm twice in five weeks.

Ironically, the "reward" for a strong start to the season is the honour to play for NSW or Queensland during State of Origin. For those outside the rugby league bubble, I understand it doesn't make sense: you let your best players go in the middle of the season to play for another team that doesn't play for premiership points? Clear as mud, right? Origin adds a layer of complexity to the NRL season. It challenges teams to perform without their stars and gives opportunity to blood young

players in the top grade. The spectacle itself is the toughest, most physical game on the planet.

While the Wests Tigers have been impressive, it's the Dragons who are likely to be the heaviest hit during the Origin period: Euan Aitken, Jack de Belin, Tyson Frizell, Cameron McInnes, Tariq Sims and Paul Vaughan are all in contention for the coveted blue jersey, while Ben Hunt is a near-certainty to get the call up for the Maroons.

Traditionally we've seen the New Zealand Warriors capitalise during Origin, but 2018 is different – and not just because the Warriors have finally found their mojo. With the addition of the historic Test between England and New Zealand in Denver, there's more player movement to throw in

the blender. Players set to travel to the United States for the June 23 Test won't technically miss a game, but their ability to back up for their NRL sides 24 hours later remains to be seen.

The Dragons will be dealt a further blow with their two superstar Englishmen, James Graham and Gareth Widdop expected to be called up to wear the St George's Cross, while the Warriors players are expected to dominate the Kiwi team.

This year's State of Origin series, coupled with the Denver Test, makes 2018 an unforgettable year for representative footy. But whether the end of the NRL season reflects the start is yet to be seen. Either way, I'm enjoying the ride, even if it costs me my tips.

The "reward" for a strong start to the season is to play Origin ... you let players go in the middle of the season to play for another team.



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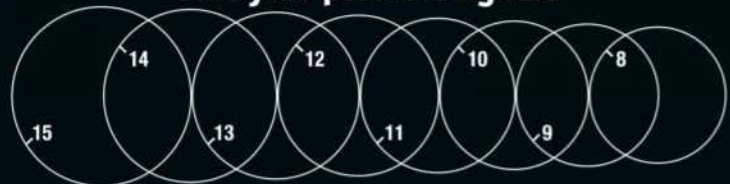


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Red, white and bruised

BY FOX SPORTS' PAUL GOW

The US Open returns next month to Shinnecock Hills, on New York's Long Island. It's a historic golf club – Shinnecock first staged the US Open in 1896 – and it's a place that Australian golf fans have come to know well, as yet another venue that was a scene of disappointment for Greg Norman.

Some 90 years after that first US Open at Shinnecock, in 1986, Norman led the tournament by a shot heading into the final round. He eventually went on to lose to the great Raymond Floyd.

In 1995, Norman faltered down the stretch again to make way for another American winner. Corey Pavin broke Australian hearts with his now famous 4-wood to three feet at the 18th hole to hold off the Shark from winning another major championship.

I have played more than 100 US PGA Tour events, and two US Opens. My first was the 2000 US Open at Pebble Beach, where Tiger Woods won by 15 strokes. I was excited for my first practice round, but as I went out there, that gave way to a realisation: how in hell am I going to break par around a course so hard? I guess I was beaten before the tournament had started – I had never played a course set up that hard.

Tiger called this major the most difficult test in all of golf. Historically, US Open courses are hard and fast, with narrow fairways lined by deep rough that even the strongest and most battle-hardened PGA Tour veterans struggle to escape even with a wedge.

It is interesting to note that only two Australians have won the US Open. Aussie golfers grow up on the hard and fast greens, such as on Melbourne's

"Tiger called this major the most difficult test in all of golf. Historically, US Open courses are hard and fast, with narrow fairways lined by deep rough."



Sandbelt, and theory suggests that they are conditioned for this type of golf.

That theory was proved correct in 2006 when Geoff Ogilvy, born and bred on the Sandbelt, raised the US Open trophy at another New York course, Winged Foot. However, we haven't had any other winners since of this event, heavily dominated by Americans, who represent 80 of the past 100 champions.

Our first winner, Hall of Famer David Graham, won the US Open at Merion in 1981. It was some 25 years later before we would have our second. So is this the year we produce another Aussie winner?

At this stage, we have three Australians confirmed in the field: Jason Day, Marc Leishman and Cameron Smith. Day and Leishman are both seasoned US Tour players with major form, Day with his win at the 2015 PGA, Leishman beaten in a play-off for the Open Championship that same year. Both have come close to the Masters' green jacket on several occasions.

The past winners at Shinnecock – Floyd and Pavin, but also Retief Goosen – have three things in common: an accurate driver, phenomenal ball-striking skills and mental toughness.

The latter would be the most important thing that will lead you to a US Open victory. Forget form and statistics on driving, ball striking, putting or scrambling – the course is going to bash you up, you are going to struggle with the rough and there will be moments when you think the whole world is against you.

Ogilvy's win back in 2006 was a perfect example of the pressure faced down the stretch. Colin Montgomerie hit a

wayward 7-iron approach to the final green that led to a double-bogey; later that afternoon, Phil Mickelson also made double-bogey at the last when a par would have meant a third-straight major championship.

Ogilvy never gave up down the stretch on a tough course and with a crowd favourite getting all the attention. He parred the last four holes to win by a stroke.

It is those players, in these moments, who embrace the hurt, fight on and go on to victory. Do we have another Aussie who has what it takes? You bet.

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Wouldn't it be grand?

THIS YEAR'S GIRO D'ITALIA BEGAN IN ISRAEL, WHILE THE TOUR DE FRANCE IS MULLING A GRAND DÉPART FURTHER AFIELD. COULD THE WORLD'S BIGGEST CYCLING RACES START IN AUSTRALIA?

IMAGINE: the best cyclists in the world rolling down a start ramp on the steps of the Opera House, before time-trialling across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. A 200-strong peloton cycling along the iconic Great Ocean Road. Or Chris Froome going head-to-head with Richie Porte on the gruelling mountain climbs of Tasmania. Now envisage one or more of these forming part of a Grand Tour, an elite trio of three-week races that dominate the annual cycling calendar.

The Tour de France, the Giro d'Italia or the Vuelta a España in Australia. Fantasy? Maybe not.

"I don't see why any of the Grand Tours could not commence in Australia," says Daryl Herbert, chief executive of race promoter GTR Events. "These events are globalising and the distances are getting smaller. Although it would be challenging and expensive, it would generate enough interest to make it viable."

The concept is more than just a pipe dream. "It is

not fanciful," says Damien de Bohun, general manager of major events at Visit Victoria and former head of the A-League.

Scott Sunderland, race director of the Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race, one of only two Australian events on the calendar of cycling's World Tour, says the idea had been kicked around. "I would say that, at this stage, there are only a few organisers able to look at this with serious intent, but the idea is definitely in a few people's sights." *Inside Sport* has also seen correspondence from Giro organisers RCS Sport indicating its interest in exploring the idea.

The Tour de France was the first Grand Tour to start abroad, with the 1954 edition beginning in Amsterdam. The Giro followed suit in the 1960s, although it was not until 1997 that the Vuelta would begin on non-Spanish soil, in neighbouring Portugal. Over the past two decades all three Grand Tours have become more adventurous. The Tour has started as far afield as Dublin, London and Leeds, while the Giro ventured to Denmark and Northern Ireland. In early May, for the first time a Grand Tour began outside Europe, when the Giro held its first three stages in Israel.

As cycling spreads its wings beyond the European heartland, it is unsurprising that these historic institutions – the first Grand Tour was run in 1903 – are also looking

globally. There have been murmurings of a Giro start in New York, and Japan is also interested.

Australia could be in that conversation. "Melbourne is a bit further than Düsseldorf," de Bohun quips, referring to the German city that hosted last year's grand depart. "But who knows. Visit Victoria are thinking big, and we would never say never."

The challenges of bringing a Grand Tour to Australia are manifold. Foremost among them is cost – one expert estimates between \$40-50 million, split between a licence fee to the event owner, a sanctioning fee to global governing body UCI, stage-running costs, logistics and marketing.



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A related issue is the consequences of long-haul travel on the riders, says Sunderland, himself a former professional cyclist. "Consideration regarding the performance impact on athletes is necessary, because it is an issue for the riders how long they need acclimatise properly," he says. Taking into account time difference, if the teams departed Australia immediately after an early afternoon stage finish, they could feasibly be in Europe late that same night. Even allowing for the rest day which normally accompanies a long transfer, the riders would be racing again less than 36 hours later.

Accounting for that, Herbert thinks the teams are the biggest obstacle. "Do they really want to travel 18 hours to Australia, race three days and then travel 18 hours back?" he asks. "You would have to pay the teams a significant amount of

money, essentially buy your way in to convince them to do this"

The logistics are another cause for concern. "All vehicles and certain materials for the teams would need to be supplied, because they obviously can't bring their buses and cars here," explains Sunderland. "All that stuff would be kept in Europe ready for their return, so the teams would be working with two sets of equipment." With a Grand Tour featuring 22 teams of eight riders, the cost and challenges of this logistical exercise are substantial.

Other challenges that plague any major sporting event held in Australia include competition and television rights. "The three main football competitions would all be ongoing at the time of the race," Sunderland notes.

De Bohun adds: "Many of these events are predicated on the value secured via broadcast rights. For many parts of the world, we are at a disadvantage because of the time difference."

If these obstacles can be overcome, the potential benefits are astronomical. The television reach of the Grand Tours is estimated to be near a billion viewers across 192 countries. Thousands of journalists from around the world flock to these events. The economic impact of the 2014 Tour de France start in Yorkshire was estimated at more than \$230 million.

It might seem far-fetched, and it will require an ambitious state government and a persuasive event organiser, but a Grand Tour could come to Australia. "The logistics are complex, the cost would be huge," concludes de Bohun. "But it could really extend the footprint of a Grand Tour and get people to look at the world differently."

- Kieran Pender

Landmark Tour: riding past Big Ben in 2014, departing through Dusseldorf [ABOVE] last year. LEFT The Giro made the jump to Israel - where next?



TOUR-IST DESTINATIONS

Australia is a big country and, if a Grand Tour was to be enticed down under for a few stages, it would only ride a small portion of it. Given the government-led nature of event funding, which state would get the spoils?

New South Wales has the star power of Sydney's icons, and does not already host a major cycling event. There is also an existing relationship with Tour de France organisers Amaury Sport Organisation, through the L'Étape Australia mass participation race in the Snowy Mountains.

"Why would one of these events come to Australia?" Herbert says. "To me, having a time trial off the Opera House - something of that nature is vital to convincing the event owners and the global cycling community. If it is to happen, I think Sydney would be a prime part."

Another obvious candidate is South Australia, which this year celebrated the 20th anniversary of its Tour Down Under. "They have the manpower and know-how to make it happen," Sunderland says. "But is it something they want to do, when they already have the Tour Down Under? And don't forget the question of budget. It is a

similar issue for Victoria, which already hosts many major events."

Victoria's events chief de Bohun is enthusiastic about the prospect of bringing a Grand Tour to his state. "The concept of an event with global recognition coming to Melbourne is very real," he says. "If you said five years ago that Brazil and Argentina - two of the biggest teams in the world - would play a football match in Melbourne, everyone would have said 'no way'. But we did it last year.

"If one of the Grand Tours wanted to engage in that conversation, it is one we would look at very seriously."

AS THE 2018 FIFA World Cup draws closer, we're still in the zone of hopeful speculation: can the Socceroos defy expectations and make a run in Russia? Can Australia punch well above its weight on the biggest footballing stage of all? To put what the nation faces in perspective, we take a look at some of the equivalent bets that fall into the category of World Cup longshots. And, hey, why not us?



Australia \$41

The bettors have modest hopes for the Socceroos, lumping them in with a tier of sides that offer the third-longest set of outright odds. But optimists looking at the top four can conjure a scenario, particularly if France starts the tournament slowly (always a danger, with the French). Coming out of Group C, the Aussies could catch favourable match-ups with their opponents in the round of 16 – probably Argentina or Croatia, but how good would it be if it was Iceland? And beyond the prospect of facing Spain in the next round, there's a plausibly beatable list of opponents for a place in the semis. Bert van Marwijk does know this end of the tournament ...

Panama \$41

Think of it this way – you get the same odds for Australia reaching the top four as Panama winning Group G. The central American nation, best known for a canal, is making its debut at the World Cup. And its welcome gift: having to contend with England and Belgium, as well as Tunisia, who checks in at a sneaky 14th in FIFA's world rankings. *Los Canaleros* (literally "The Canal Men") deserve some goodwill as the underdog of the 2018 Cup, and they did the world the favour of eliminating the Americans on that crazy, last day of CONCACAF qualifying, thus ridding us of the question: was Trump going to show up in Russia?



Alexandre Lacazette \$34

In the top goal scorers' market, an Aussie-type bet means you'll be looking at the Arsenal striker, who is no sure thing to be on the field for France (Olivier Giroud attracts similar odds). Lacazette had a strange season for the Gunners: started well before fading, had his place called into question when Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang came over, then finished strong. If Lacazette can stay in form, maybe he'll be the one at the head of the powerful French line-up. And with a World Cup in Russia, we're going to invoke the spirit of Oleg Salenko, the Russian who got the Golden Boot at USA '94, mainly on the back of netting five against Cameroon.



Poland \$51

The Poles winning the whole thing would be rather improbable – they didn't qualify in 2014 or '10. But this is a football nation with surprising pedigree: third-place finishes in 1982 and 1974, and they breezed through qualifying, reaching a height of fifth on the FIFA rankings in 2017. There's high-level quality in the line-up: Juventus goalie Wojciech Szczesny, Dortmund defender Lukasz Piszczek and, above all, Bayern's Robert Lewandowski (below right), the kind of elite striker whose goals could carry a country on a dream ride. All the way to victory? Poland does have a nice path coming out of Group H.



PHOTOS BY Getty Images



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Super Netball Season 2

1 This year's Suncorp Super Netball playing group is making Australian sporting history, appearing in a set of 2018 trading cards – the first series of Australian sporting cards to focus specifically on female athletes. Each of the league's 80 players will feature on her own card. There will also be cards dedicated to Australian Diamonds players and Liz Ellis Award-winning players. As well, rare #TeamGirls augmented reality cards can be found in four out of every five packs, which allow fans to scan the cards with a smartphone to unlock a video featured on the card of the athlete.

2 For those slow on the uptake of how elite-level domestic netball in Australia works these days, here are some bullet points. The ANZ Championship no longer operates, with Aussie and Kiwi-based clubs going their separate ways at the end of the 2016 season. Australia now has an eight-team league, featuring stalwart outfits the Queensland Firebirds, NSW Swifts, Adelaide Thunderbirds, West Coast Fever and Melbourne Vixens. Three new AFL/NRL club-owned teams: Giants Netball, Collingwood Magpies and Sunshine

Coast Lightning (Storm) formed ahead of last year's inaugural Super Netball season.

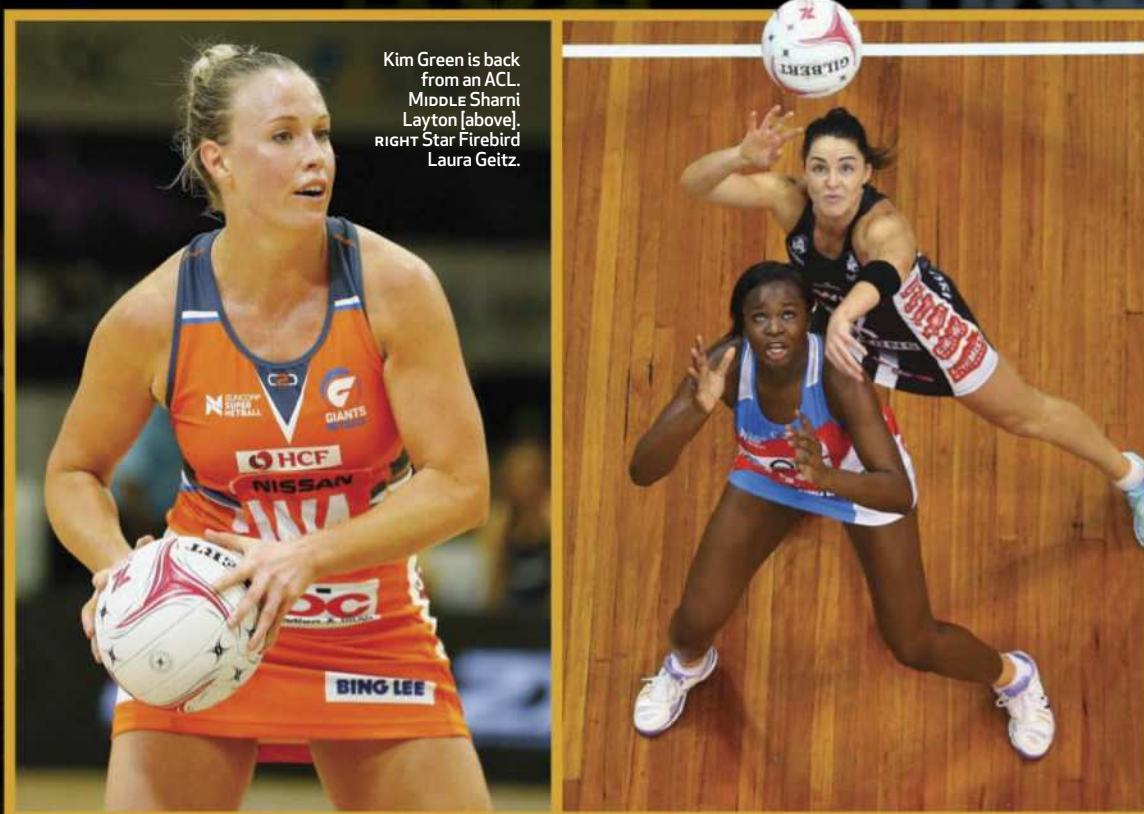
3 The state of Queensland may have recently missed out on securing the right to host the NRL grand final any time soon, but the banana-benders in recent years have certainly stamped their ownership all over Australia's elite domestic netball title-decider. By fate rather than by design, the Brisbane Entertainment Centre has hosted the past three grand finals: two won by the Firebirds over the Swifts across the 2015-16 seasons, as well as last year's inaugural Super Netball showdown between the Lightning and Giants Netball.

4 The Sunshine Coast Lightning stunned the Aussie netball world by taking out last year's inaugural Super Netball title ... in their first-ever season. They toppled fellow newcomers Giants Netball 65-48 in front of 9,000 fans. For those of you who missed our feature story on the Lightning in our May 2018 issue, the Lightning is a successful partnership between the Melbourne Storm Group, University of Sunshine Coast and Sunshine Coast

Regional Council. They are coached by New Zealand Netball legend Noeline Taurua and captained by English superstar Geva Mentor.

5 Super Netball has heralded the long-awaited return of three of Australia's most loved players, who are all returning from long layoffs for a variety of reasons. Aussie Diamonds stalwart defender Laura Geitz is back after stepping down from her Firebirds duties in 2017 to welcome her first offspring into the world, megastar centre Kimberley Green is back for the Giants after suffering an ACL injury back in round five of last season, while larger than life goalkeeper Sharni Layton has also returned to the court following mental health-related time away.

6 Our netballers are playing under a vastly different competition points structure compared to the traditional two points for a win and one for a draw way of things which most major sports leagues in Australia have adopted and stuck to over the



Kim Green is back from an ACL. MIDDLE Sharni Layton (above). RIGHT Star Firebird Laura Geitz.

years. In 2018, every quarter is a match within a match, with teams receiving one competition point for every quarter they win. Teams now have the potential to receive eight comp points for a win. This is making things interesting towards quarter, half and three quarter time ... It should also make it easier to separate the teams towards the end of the home and away on such a hotly contested competition table.

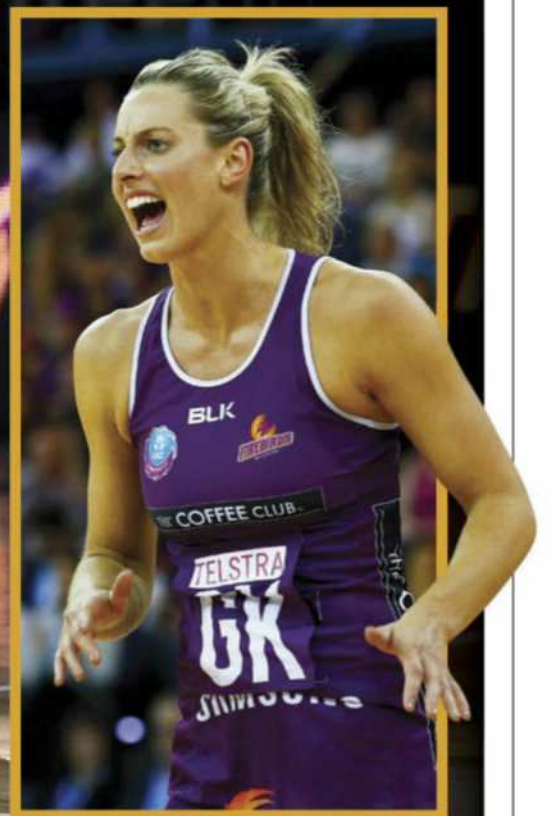
7 There are plenty more changes in operation throughout this year's 14-round preliminary season. Another major alteration relates to time-outs. Each team is now entitled to request up to two time-out breaks per half. This is a further development on a rule introduced last year, which allowed one time out per half. Another interesting change is the allowance of one nominated player/team staff in each squad to walk up and down the specified bench zone while communicating with their on-court team-mates.

8 Nine's Wide World of Sports is broadcasting two games of Super Netball Season 2 live per round in HD. In WA and SA, at least two games per week will be broadcast on the Nine Network including a number of local matches to be broadcast on 9Gem and Nine local (check guides). Subscribers can also stream all games live via the Netball Live app. The app offers behind-the-scenes content, match highlights and other exclusive stuff. Also, all games are available to watch on demand.

9 The big topic of discussion in netball following the recent Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast: while designed to strengthen the Australian game, there was a mighty fine handful of English players in last year's Super Netball comp, including Helen Housby at the Swifts and compatriots Jo Harten and Serena Guthrie, who ply their trade at the Giants, as well as the inaugural player of the year Geva Mentor. England did win gold at the Comms. Make of that what you will ...

10 There are a few reasons the stands are always packed whenever you see highlights of Netball games on TV. One of those is that the on-court product is of the best standard of netball on the planet. The other could be ticket prices. Kids can enter arenas across the country for as little as \$5. Adult prices start at \$20, concessions from \$10, while you can take the fam for as little as \$40.

- James Smith





Aussie Cricket Culture

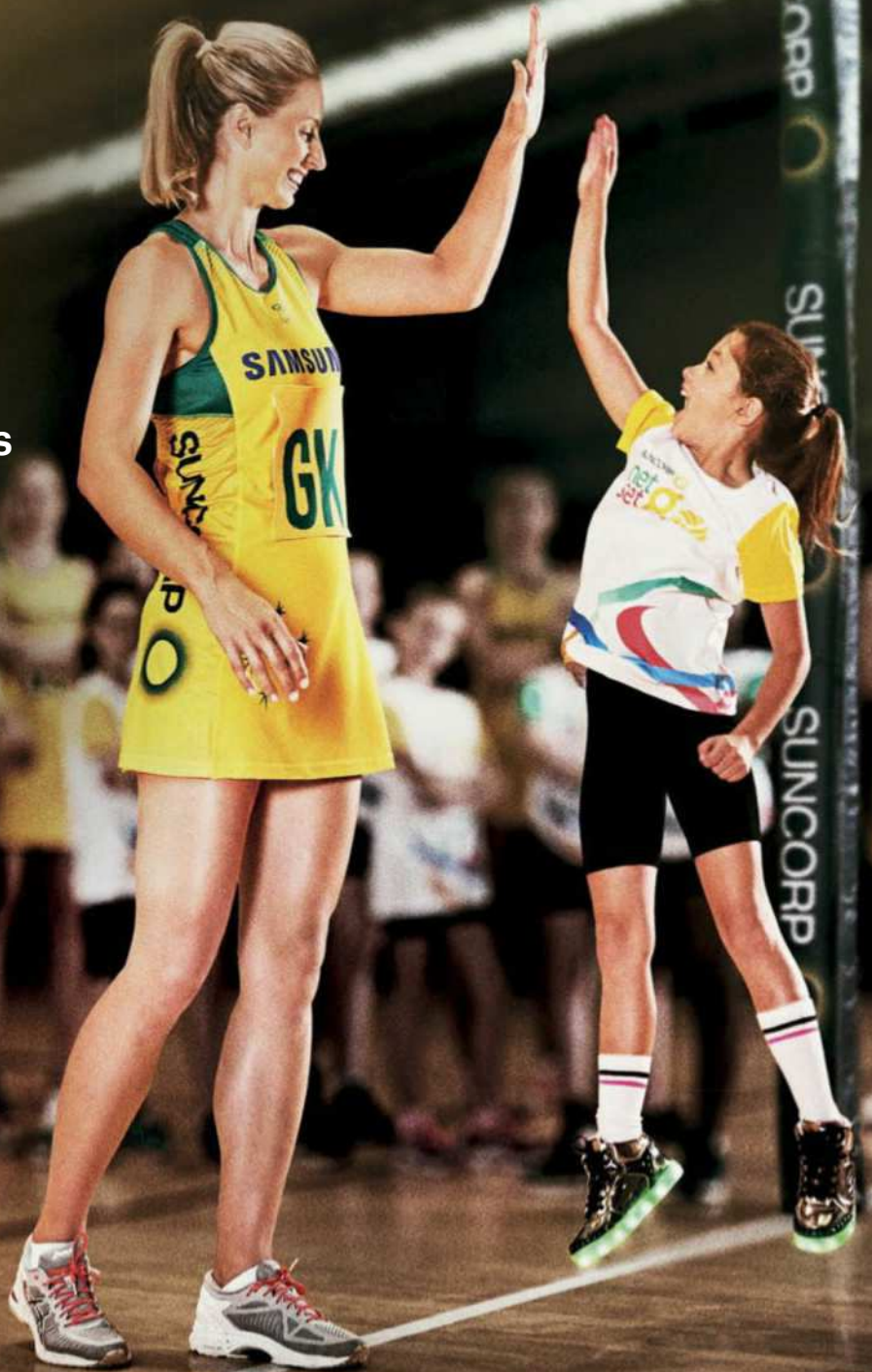
AS RICK MCCOSKER CONDUCTS HIS REVIEW, GET YOURSELF ACQUAINTED WITH THESE TOTEMS OF OZ CRICKET.

	DEFINITION OF TERM	CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE	FINE DETAIL	ALTERNATIVES	SUBJECT TO REVIEW?
BAGGY GREEN	A cap. So well known, you don't even have to say "cap" when referring to it.	With its antique feel, the baggy green connects Australian cricket back to its roots.	Culture warrior Steve Waugh made wearing it mandatory for first-day first sessions of Tests.	Why do the players change into another cap in the dressing room? Can't be the advertising, right?	Not on your life. The baggy green predates the founding of the country.
UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS ISLAND	Technically a poem. But better known as the team victory song.	Rod Marsh wrote it! But a pantsless David Boon elevated it into an art form.	Last line: "Australia, you little beauty." As Wiki notes, when sung, "little" is replaced by "fucking".	<i>Khe Sanh</i> , although it's a little long-winded for a victory song.	Hard to see this being replaced. Maybe with polite lyrics, and pants.
THE CAPTAIN IS THE BEST PLAYER	Paradigm for selection, in which best XI is chosen, and best of the XI is the leader.	We don't do Mike Brearley types here. Captains gotta captain's knock.	Made a huge exception for a struggling Tubby Taylor, who then went and made 334*.	We dabbled in choosing a different ODI and T20 captain. Still didn't feel right.	Could be interesting – team might need a specialised leader (down, Clarke, down!)
"PLAY MY NATURAL GAME"	Affirmation for cricketer to continue doing what got him into the team in the first place..	Applied broadly, Aussie players are always expected to have a go.	See Edgbaston 2015, or any tour of India. The limitations of this approach become obvious.	Let Glenn Maxwell be Glenn Maxwell. Play your un-natural game. Or something.	The big issue here is, T20 is fast becoming the "natural" way to play.
PAT HOWARD	High-performance manager at Cricket Australia.	As far as we can tell, he's the bloke all the old-school players dump on.	Howard played rugby. But that's the high-performance deal: whatever the sport, winning is the same.	John Buchanan. Because we're not even sure cricketers need coaches.	Surely Howard has to be held up to scrutiny. Where does cheating fall under "performance"?
THE LINE	The thing our players go right up to, but never cross.	"The Line" is a more vivid term than "play hard and fair", so it stuck.	The Line validated all manner of bad behaviour – sledging, mental disintegration – because it was never crossed.	Treating opponents and conducting yourself in-match with school-level decency. Too much to ask?	This is what McCosker's job is all about, really. If nothing else, he at least becomes remembered for something other than a broken jaw.

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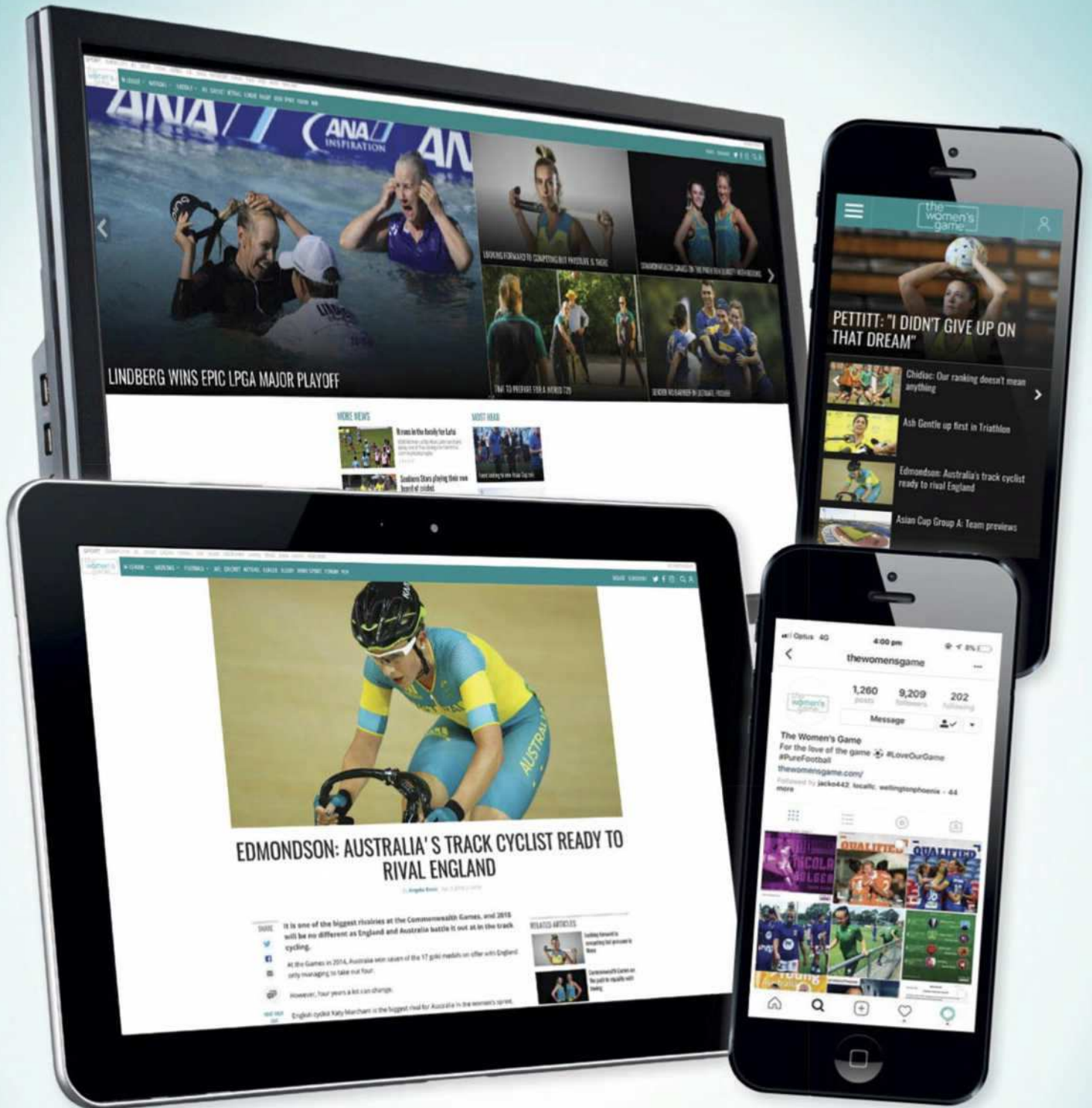
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Best of ...

With the AFL floating the radical idea of a grand final series, we took a look at the various best-of formats. Bottom line: properly identifying the better team is a lot harder than you think, particularly when you get down to the underlying maths.



(State of Origin, Bledisloe Cup)

In 36 Origin series: Queensland 21, NSW 13, drawn two. Using the first match as a proxy for a one-game Origin: Queensland 18, NSW 18.



(Ashes cricket, MLB division series)

Assuming one team is favoured against an opponent 60/40, the difference in win probability for favourites from a three- to a five-game series is 64.8 percent to 68.3 percent.



(NBA and NHL Play-offs, MLB League Championship and World Series)

Only six comebacks from 3-0 in history of best-of-seven: four in ice hockey, and one each in baseball and NBA.



(America's Cup 2017)

Premier yacht race has been contested over 13-, 17-, three-, nine- and seven-race series since WWII, having seen both big sweeps and crazy comebacks.



(World Snooker Championship rounds played over 25, final over 35)

In a best-of-23 series, a one-out-of-three underdog would win less than 5 percent of the time – a level known as statistically significant.



(Total games in AFL season: 207, NRL 201)

If the superior team is favoured only 55/45, a statistically significant series has to go to extreme lengths. First to 135 wins!

4

things you must not miss

Goes to 11

The courts turn to clay and the umpires start saying "zéro", which means there's a Grand Slam in Paris. And in another rite of the **French Open (May 27-June 10)**, Rafael Nadal is the favourite. The Spaniard is seeking his 11th at Roland Garros, which would tie Margaret Court's mark for most wins at a single Slam (she won hers at the Australian Open, although seven pre-Open era). With Roger Federer again taking his clay-court hiatus, the challenge will have to come from this long-awaited next generation, with Dominic Thiem and Sascha Zverev bringing some form. On the women's side, there's another big name driving the narrative – Serena Williams makes her grand return, out since Melbourne last year, and seeking a fourth French title of her own.



Make it Ukraine

A certain football tournament will be played in Russia next month, but before that, the sport's finest go to their day jobs in the **UEFA Champions League final (May 26)**, which will conveniently take place one country over in Ukraine. Real Madrid will pursue an impressive third-straight, thanks primarily to Cristiano Ronaldo's impeccable sense of extra-time timing. But for those who get into football nationalism every World Cup year, dig this interesting fact: Europe's premier comp produced four semi-finalists from the big four leagues (England, Spain, Italy and Germany) for the first time since 1981. Whichever club stands triumphant in Kiev's Olimpiyskiy Stadium, there'll be some early flag-waving to do.

Fourth-time charm?

Casual fans of the NBA might be used to Warriors-Cavaliers by now – it's all we've known of the **NBA Finals (from May 31)** the last three times around. But this season, there's a good chance the band doesn't get back together. The Houston Rockets, led by James Harden (below) and Chris Paul, claimed the best record in the league, and have the kind of high-scoring, three-slugging attack that could keep pace with the mighty Dubs in the west. As for the Cavs' challengers in the east, Toronto is desperate to make a postseason leap. But the most intriguing possibility, particularly for Aussies, is the ahead-of-schedule 76ers. With Ben Simmons in his first play-off campaign, his young team has surprised everyone with its late-season form upswing.



Irish swing

Irish rugby is on a high (tempered somewhat by a high-profile sexual assault case involving a group of players) – the Joe Schmidt-coached outfit swept to the grand slam in the Six Nations, defeating England at Twickenham and sending Eddie Jones packing back to, well, here. There's a notion they might rest frontline stars such as fly-half Johnny Sexton, halfback Conor Murray and prop Tadhg Furlong after a big campaign, so here's hoping they make it. And if they do, they'll be a good test for Reece Hodges (above) and his gold-clad company – three good Tests, as it were, with the **Wallabies vs Ireland (June 9)** starting in Brisbane, then Melbourne (**June 16**) and finishing up in Sydney (**June 23**).

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The Winners



Best Club

**Coomera Cutters
Junior Rugby League
Club (Qld)**

Just five years after they started, the Cutters have grown to become the second biggest junior rugby league club on the Gold Coast. With a focus on kids, footy and fun, our 2018 Best Club winners could hardly go wrong. Participant numbers have swelled to more than 700 and over half the players come from the Pacific region. To celebrate the diversity of its membership, the Cutters hold special events such as Whanau Ora (Family) Day. A commitment to low registration fees has had a positive impact in steering youngsters away from trouble by keeping them positively engaged. And to help with that growth spurt, \$5000 worth of INTERSPORT vouchers is heading their way.

Honourable mentions: Bayside Hockey Club (VIC), Trigg Island Surf Life Saving Club (WA)



Best Coach

**Hayley Stevenson,
Wilston Grange
Triathlon Club
(Qld)**

Hayley Stevenson is the driving force behind this club and a seven-day-a-week dynamo who inspires through example, showing it's possible to have a demanding full-time job, a young family and still commit to a gruelling sport. The mother of two is up at 3.30am to get her own training done, before motivating others to swim, bike, run and have fun. Stevenson established the club seven years ago so she'd "have a friend to train with" and now as president/coach, marshals close to 80 members, most in their 40s. Says the accredited coach: "I love seeing people realise what they can do."

**Honourable mentions:
Stephen Bown, Malvern Lacrosse Club (VIC), Nathan Davis, Braves Baseball Club (WA)**



Best Club Stalwart

**Jeffrey Waldron,
Coleraine
Football Netball
Club (Vic)**

Is there anything this tireless club volunteer doesn't do? Jeffrey Waldron, who is deaf, drives, packs, sorts and unloads the equipment trailer, cleans up the club rooms, works the main gate on match day, supervises the Thursday night meal takings, creates and donates cabinetry items, and is a timekeeper. He's one in a million, says club president Ashley Lambert. "Jeffrey's there before the committee, before the players, he's buzzing around with ideas, he's looking for things to do. He's just a livewire."

Honourable mention: Elva Wright, Robertson Tennis Club (NSW)

Best Sports Association



**Upper Great
Southern Hockey
Association (WA)**

With its own club rooms and international-standard synthetic turf, the Narrogin-based sports association has attracted two international series in the past three years. But it's the innovative approach to building the game at the grassroots that caught the eye. UGSHA oversees about 46 teams each week – around 700 players across all grades – and has increased the number of qualified umpires by 30 through its Green Shirt Umpiring program. UGSHA is a proactive advocate of sport and this year introduced "walking hockey" for seniors and players with disabilities.

**Honourable mention:
Croydon & Districts Table Tennis Association (Vic)**

THE SPORTSCOVER™ CLUBBIES 2018

Best Masters Performance



Ken Baird, Australian Myths & Legends Basketball (Vic)

Age is just a number, but what a number. Ken Baird turns 90 this month and is still basking in basketball gold from the 2018 Australian Masters Games in Tasmania, where he took on the whippersnappers in the over 75s. A regular at the Australian and Pan Pacific Masters – 26 tournaments in all – he also holds a rowing record and until recently played tennis and rode a motorcycle! No wonder Australian Myths and Legends president Ian Farr describes him as “an inspiration to his team-mates”.

Honourable mention: Grant Simpson, West Beach Surf Life Saving Club (SA)

Best Administrator



Perry Johnstone, Alexandria Rovers Rugby League Football Club/ Sydney Indigenous Rugby League (NSW)

He’s the heart and soul of Alexandria Rovers in the inner-city suburb of Sydney. Johnstone has been the club secretary for his old juniors club for 12 years. Whether it’s buying boots for youngsters, transporting them to and from games, or dishing up a feed on match day, this unsung hero always goes the extra mile. The Rovers turn 70 this year and count international and NRL players among their alumni. But that’s only half the story. Johnstone says: “Someone asked me: once how many people have you coached who have gone on to play first grade, or gone on to play for Australia? And I said, ‘I’ve got a different number. How many boys were kept out of jail?’”

Honourable mentions: Kirsten Royley, Albany Creek Excelsior FC (Qld), Brenton Westell, Unley Football Club (SA)



Best Facility

Eastside Activity Centre (TAS)

It started as a trampoline club and expanded into gymnastics, with four major extensions over the past six years. This \$3m facility, developed without any government assistance, is a deeply personal mission for owner and mother of five, Felicity Harvey, whose own daughter’s health problems affected her balance and coordination. Since then, it’s been full steam ahead for Harvey and her husband. “We’ve just been adding more and more programs, trying to get all the kids motivated into sports.”

Honourable mention: Flyaway Gymnastics (NSW)

Brad Fittler

BRAD FITTLER'S mind is one of rugby league's most interesting. After all, it takes someone with a habit of thinking outside the box to consider – and then accept – the challenge of coaching an underdog league outpost like Lebanon at a World Cup, when he didn't really need to. Who knows? Perhaps, after trying everything else in the playbook in their quest to better the Maroons, this was what impressed the Blues boardroom the most about Fittler's candidacy: something different, a fresh take.

Brad Fittler as NSW Origin coaching candidate wasn't actually a thing until Parramatta great and Origin insider Peter

Sterling broached the possibility to the man himself on *The Footy Show* one year. That night Freddy, casually shrugging his shoulders, asked back, why not? Indeed – he's proven he can get a group together and have it purring in the one direction, as evidenced by his early days coaching at the Roosters a few years back, and by his successes for the blue and golds in City-Country.

As candid and laidback as Freddy appears on screen, there can't be too many out there with the playing resume of this hot-stepping Penrith product: 336 NRL games for the Panthers and Sydney Roosters, 38 for Australia and, most importantly in the context of his chat with us, 31 State of Origins for the Cockroaches.



What are your earliest memories of watching State of Origin footy?

I remember being more nervous as usual as a kid when Origin was about to come up; that build-up. I'd just be nervous all week. My first real Origin memory is of my uncle Matthew driving me to the Sydney Cricket Ground for my first Origin game. I was 12 or 13. I forget what year it was – the year Greg Dowling scored the try off the Wally Lewis attempted field goal. It poured rain. I was standing on the hill. It was one of the greatest nights of my life.

At 18 years and 114 days old, you were the youngest-ever Origin player at that point. Here's a question which resonates with the whole current debates about another Penrith product, Nathan Cleary: as a kid, how Origin-ready did you feel?

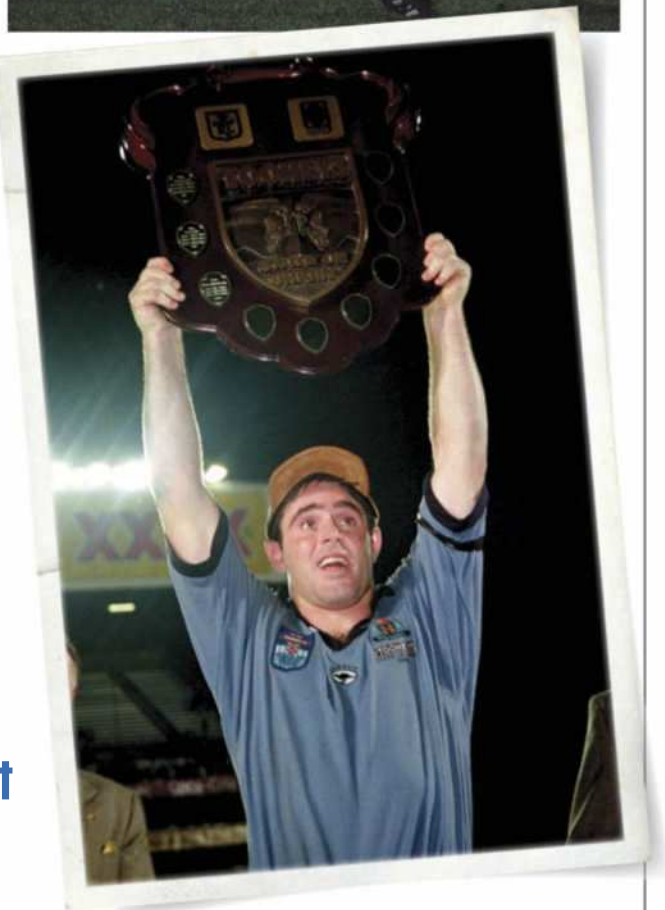
Everything was coming that quick. I never really had time to think about it. The year before, two weeks out from the semi-finals, I made my debut in reserve grade; played first grade the week after and then semi-finals in first grade the two following weekends after that.

Actually, I remember that year, Gus [Gould] was the new coach at Penrith. For my first couple of games, he played me in reserve grade because he thought I was getting ahead of myself. I was just riding the wave.

The one thing about it all is, it hasn't really



First memory: Wally. LEFT AND BELOW Fittler led a Blue-wash in the '96 series.



helped, but a lot of the things I've had to do with league, I don't really think about it ... It's got me in trouble sometimes, but I rely on my instincts and run with it. As I've gotten older, I've had to change that a little bit.

Why did you want to coach the NSW Blues?

I think I can do a good job. I just feel I have good rapport when I coach. Even when I coached the Roosters, we had a fantastic period there where we went from coming last, to playing in a couple of semi-finals. Ultimately though, I don't know if it was the right stage for me; I'd had young children.

I think the situation this time around might suit me more. I was part of Laurie Daley's team in '13 or '14. I've always loved State of Origin. Like a lot of people, it just grabs you.

It wouldn't have really started, of course, unless Peter Sterling hadn't asked me about it on *The Footy Show* one day. I think it was when Craig Bellamy was retiring, Peter Sterling said to me, "Would you coach Origin?" I just shrugged my shoulders and said, "Yeah, why not? Of course."

Again, whether I was right for it at that time ... I've been involved with the NSW junior pathways kids for a couple of years, and obviously with City-Country. I just feel like I can add value.

As you've said, you've had a fair bit of experience in this sector of the game by now; what are the fundamentals to coaching a

"For my first couple of games Gus played me in reserve grade because he thought I was getting ahead of myself."

representative rugby league team? What do you need to get right early?

In the short time you have, you need to find a way to promote the ideal of the players playing for each other. There needs to be some sort of common ground.

Without knowing you personally, you seem to be a bloke who can get a camaraderie going ...

I hope so. Origin is obviously a step up. In those City teams I had coached, we were underdogs for a lot of those games; being the underdog is a lot easier. With the high-quality players you have in teams like this, it's about sometimes getting out of their road and letting them find what's necessary themselves.

We don't expect you to give away too much of the game-plan for NSW here yet, but what's the central direction of your coaching philosophy? What mindset do you employ when you enter this occult art?

I think the key is, you have to be ... I just throw everything I have at it. Whatever is needed will just have to be done.

And that changes all the time, because you're constantly watching players and thinking about how the team can play at its best. I haven't put in concrete how I think the team should play, I'll wait and see what the team looks like when we pick it and then go from there. But the key for me will be to get the players knowing that I'm in it as much as they are. ▶



What did you pick up from your recent gig coaching Lebanon at the World Cup that you think might help you in Origin?

With that one, the association with all the boys being Lebanese really helped. From a World Cup tournament approach point of view, it was about harnessing their passion for their home country and turning it into effort.

I suppose the one thing I learnt was, again, you have to hand it over to the players. We are there to give them some direction, boundaries and guidelines. They need to feel like they're there to do the work, but they just need to know we're doing whatever we can.

Have you ever given anyone a spray as a coach? Has that direction ever worked for you?

Oh yeah, but I try not to pre-empt anything. That's another one of those things where you have to rely on instinct. If you feel like the team would be better off if someone was told they're doing the wrong thing, then you gotta say it.

Did that coaching tactic ever work on you?

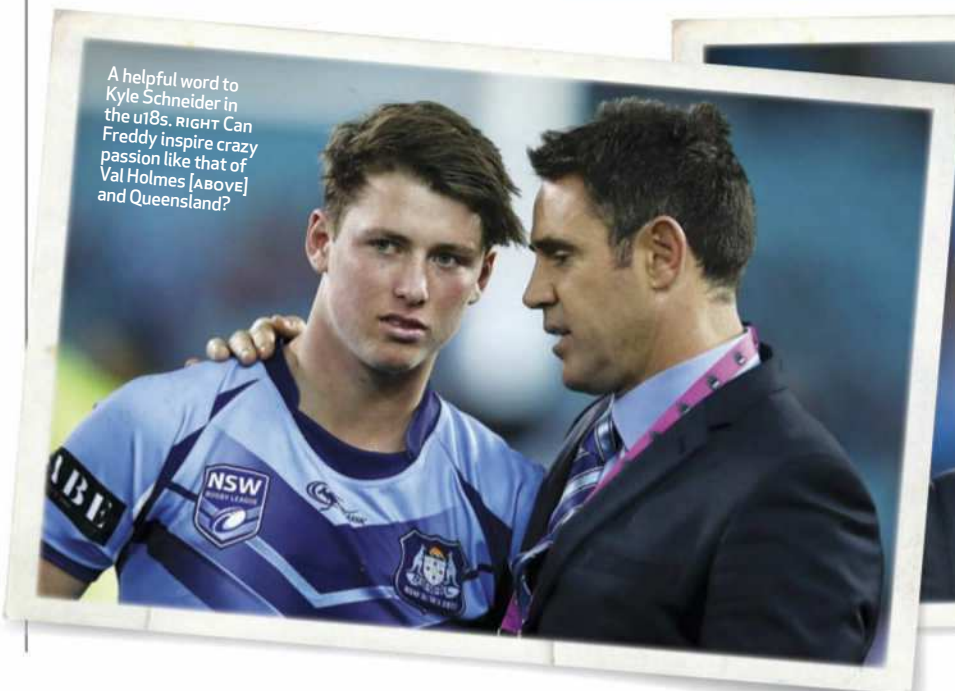
Oh, absolutely. And I copped plenty.

From an outsider's perspective, do you think there would have been any way NSW could have avoided the pain of the last decade and a bit,

considering the talent Queensland has had?

I think the way the game has rolled for the last ten years, with the Melbournes and the Cowboys, they're exciting teams; the way they play. They've been the best teams consistently year-in, year-out for a long time now. And they do go into pretty much every Origin series leading the competition and with a lot of confidence.

The really appealing part at the moment, though, is that you have St George-Illawarra, Penrith, the Tigers, even the Warriors have a couple of New South Wales players, the Roosters... There are some Sydney teams doing really well. I don't think I've seen that for a long time. Whether it's a change



A helpful word to Kyle Schneider in the u18s. RIGHT Can Freddy inspire crazy passion like that of Val Holmes [ABOVE] and Queensland?



"They say 'us Queenslanders will get through this.' I've never heard anyone say, 'us New South Welsh-people will get through this' ... ever."

in how the refs are ruling, or maybe some of the Queensland players are getting older, and their teams are changing as well ... I don't think the comp has been in this sort've position for a long time.

If everyone stays fit and healthy, there's going to be a really good footy team there and I think the Blues fans will really be drawn to them. If we base it all on effort and courage and all those sorts of things, the fans will really pick up on that. We have 20 of those NSW-eligible players playing like that at the moment.

There certainly seems to be a bigger pool of NSW players to choose from this time around?

Yeah, and I don't know whether that's because the Melbournes and the Cowboys aren't doing as well, or just because some of those teams and some of those players have just got to a certain age and we've come to a time where we're like, "You know what? We think we're good enough."

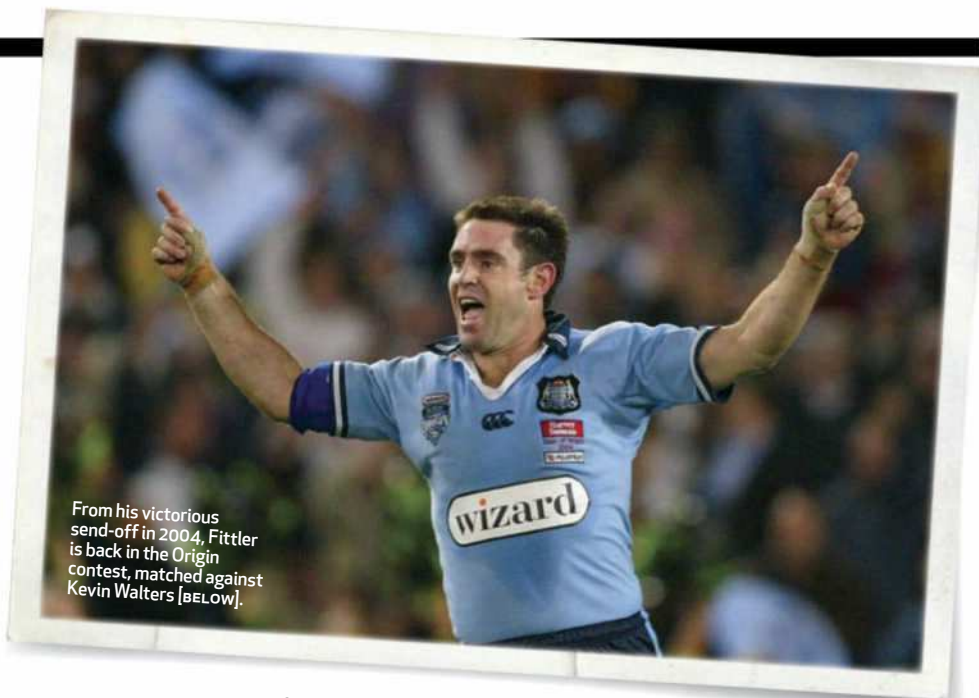
It's often said that Queensland "gets" Origin. Are you able to unpack the meaning of that, and how will NSW get Origin under your guidance?

Well, I don't really dispute it. When I spoke to Darren Lockyer the other day, he told me the first footballer he followed was Wally Lewis - that being Wally the Queensland. And that back when he was a youngster, the first team everyone in Queensland followed was Queensland.

The fact is, NSW is just a different state. Victoria and Queensland, they're so parochial in those two states, whereas New South Wales has always been divided up into tribes. There's country people and westies and city people, northern beaches people. It's just a different make-up. But I don't think it means we shouldn't be able to win footy games, and inspire kids from all over New South Wales ...

For Queensland, because they're everyone's first team, it's just always been like that. They've been an underdog state for a long time, but they've worked hard. Since birth, when they sit at the table, their parents start talking about Queensland. When I hear journalists on TV, they say "us Queenslanders will get through this." I've never heard anyone say, "us New South Welsh-people will get through this, ever." I've heard five journalists in the last couple of months, because obviously my ears prick up, mention while they're talking about a couple of blokes tackling a drug addict with a knife, or something to do with a storm, it's always followed up by "but us Queenslanders will get through it".

It's different for us, but we have to embrace that. I don't ram it down anyone's throat, that they have to love their state or love this or whatever. That's



From his victorious send-off in 2004, Fittler is back in the Origin contest, matched against Kevin Walters [BELOW].

something that has to come from inside. It doesn't give us any less opportunity to inspire or bring a heap of people together and give them a bit of a cheer and get them looking forward to a night out, or something to watch on telly or somewhere to go. We get the same opportunity there.

What do you make of the whole Origin monster concept? Is this now the jersey every player wants to have?

I'm not sure it's the jersey every player wants, but it's the game everyone wants to play in. The build-up, the fans, the atmosphere, the coverage. It's big. The audience; you get to test yourself on the biggest scale. Test footy is the ultimate you can play: playing for your country. But again, the game everyone wants to play is State of Origin. There's no denying that.

That charge-down try in game three at Telstra Stadium in 2004 - what a way to go out in Origin. Are you a bloke who treasures moments

like that, or is it more the mateship-side of the experience that you celebrate?

The thing I remember about that most ... I still remember it. I can see the ball spinning from the kick, and when I scored the try, the most vivid thing for me is turning around and seeing all these young blokes rushing at me, congratulating me, being together. Obviously we won the game. Before the try, the clarity in seeing the football, and then the best and most vivid thing is putting the ball down and turning around and seeing all these young players who I was never going to get a chance to play footy with; just getting the opportunity to celebrate.

Maybe you'll get that opportunity - to go down to the sideline at the end of game two or three and have all the young blokes running at you again?

Yeah, but I don't really get to decide that.

- James Smith





HOT SHOT

A shocking bus crash, which killed 15 members of the Humboldt Broncos junior ice hockey team, sent the sport into mourning. The Winnipeg Jets, one province over, and the Chicago Blackhawks paid their respects – to a man, on every jersey.

PHOTO BY Jason Halstead / Getty Images





Blue steel

As he enters his second series as captain of the NSW State of Origin team, Sydney Roosters star Boyd Cordner opens up on the life experiences which prepared him for one of his sport's toughest gigs.

By **JAMES SMITH**

Back in the mid-winter of 2003, Queensland and New South Wales were about to face off at Suncorp Stadium in the opening clash of the 22nd series of Australian sport's most vicious rivalry. The Gordon Tallis-skipped Maroons were dotted out across their half of the field, awaiting the kick-off from Andrew Johns' visiting Blues. Hulking prop Shane Webcke caught the ball on the first bounce in his own in-goal. He barely had enough time to commence his routine charge upfield before he was met rudely by a blue missile by the name of Danny Buderus. The Novocastrian rake hit Webcke hard in a full body check on the Blues' tryline, which would have stung both men from head to boot. The impact sent Buderus bouncing back in the direction from which he quickly had come, with Webcke

made to stumble like a local after last beers at the Caxton Hotel in six hours' time. It was a brave play by Buderus, who gave away 20kg to the rugged Brisbane Broncos stalwart in fighting weight.

Watching all this from the lounge room of his family's home in the small surfing and fishing town of Old Bar, on the NSW mid-north coast, was a ten-year-old kid named Boyd Cordner. This reckless, almost insane piece of tenacious play by Buderus lit a spark within the rough and tumble kid's inner workings. Boyd, watching on with his father Chris and older brother Dane, had known about Origin and footy and all that: dad was a former lower-grade Bulldog, Dragon and Steeler. Now, Boyd ate the sport of rugby league for breakfast, but this collision put a new spin on this thing called mate-vs-mate. This wasn't merely footy ▶

... this was something next-level.

It's important for Blues supporters to hear about the passion NSW players have for State of Origin rugby league. Type "Queensland + Origin + Spirit" into Google and your phone or PC will start billowing smoke, such is the plethora of editorials your device has to churn through related to how deeply Queensland cares about Origin, about how Queensland wins most of the time because Queensland "gets" Origin.

New South Welsh people care about it, too. They're perhaps not as passionate enough to hang Maroon *Queenslandah!*-esque flags across garage doors at Christmas (your author actually saw this, in Hervey Bay last year). They show their support in different ways. In the footy realm, NSW can at times prove a very divided state, mostly along club territory lines, but that's just the way things are. Despite these divided loyalties, two 80,000-plus crowds turned up to ANZ Stadium in Homebush in 2013, eight years into Queensland's record-breaking Origin domination, to cheer on their beloved Blues.

"I can remember watching State of Origin as a young kid; all I knew was rugby league," Cordner, current captain of the NSW Origin

team, shares with *Inside Sport*. "When I was a youngster, when Origin time rolled around, it was massive in our household. I can remember going to school and being so excited; couldn't wait to get home to sit in front of the telly and watch it.

"One of my earliest memories of Origin was when Danny Buderus raced down off the kick-off and put that hit on Shane Webcke; it's still one of my favourite Origin memories for sure."

At a playing weight of 102kg and standing at a towering 188cm, Cordner looks country-tough; if his head happened to hit yours in the chaos of what goes on out there on the field, you'll be chewing on Nurofen for a week or two after. He'd clamp you like a crab in tackles and would probably be as hard as one of those rodeo bulls to grab and pull down when he had the ball. Kids build that

ruggedness from years of backyard footy against their older brothers and dads, not in sessions at Fitness First.

"I grew up in a little town called Old Bar on the mid-North Coast," he shares. "I went to school up there and mate, to tell you the truth, ever since I could remember, it was all about living and breathing footy. That's all I ever wanted to do since I was a kid. I've loved it.

"Even through high school, people used to ask me what would I want to do for a job. I'd be like, 'Look, I want to play football.' And they'd be like, 'You have to have a back-up plan.' But I'd tell them I was too focussed. It's all I've ever wanted to do. Even to this day, if they ask me if I want to study or anything, I don't really like anything else, you know what I mean?"

It's been well-documented by now that Cordner's mum, Lanai, passed away after a battle with breast cancer when Boyd was just four years old, leaving their dad to raise their sons as a single parent. It was a boys' house for a few years there. Cordner's Sydney mum, Donna Mason, would play an important mentoring role as the Roosters' 15-year-old recruit and emerging backrower

"I HAD A LOT OF GROWING UP TO DO PRETTY EARLY."



From country kid [LEFT] to boom backrower in the city [BELOW RIGHT], Cordner was soon clad in Origin blue in 2013.



Leading by example in game three last year, but he could only watch and wait [BELOW] for his first series win as captain.



relocated from the bush to life in the big smoke, but earlier on it was footy, footy and more of it.

“My dad played a bit of footy. He played in the country, and then came down and played for the Dragons and Bulldogs and Illawarra as well. He played a lot of reserve grade. It obviously helped having a Dad who could play a bit of footy; steered me down that path. He played a lot of positions: he was a half, hooker, played a lot in the centres. He wasn’t a very tall player, but he was pretty well-built. I haven’t really seen much footage of him, but everyone I’ve spoken to has said he was a fair player.

“I can remember going to school, then to football training, and then going home, and then heading over to the big boys’ training at night time. I’d be over there till all hours, running around, kicking the footy, annoying them guys and then coming home late at 8.30, having dinner, jumping into bed and doing it all again the next day.”

Boyd Cordner’s State of Origin debut came just ten years after he watched that hit Buderus put on Webecke – the one that lit the Origin flame for the current



NSW captain. Outsiders often only get to see the finished product, the action in front of the curtain. As big as Origin can appear, what the hell is it like for a 21-year-old kid from the country to actually be playing in one? Can any of you, dear readers, imagine the nerves, the mental trauma, the thrill, the pain? How would you be?

“My debut was back in 2013 for game three; I ended up being selected as 18th man,” Cordner recalls. “So I went into camp, trained all week. I wasn’t even meant to play. I think it was the Sunday before the game on the Wednesday. Our coach Laurie Daley

called me in. It was our day off, so I’m thinking, ‘Hang on, what’s going on here?’

“I sat down with him and he told me he was going to play me. I was 21 at the time. Mate, I couldn’t tell ya the emotions ... it was something pretty crazy and surreal. Dreams had come true at that meeting. I walked out of the room. Couldn’t wait to call Dad and my brother ...

“It was just the build-up and how much it means to everyone. It’s a pretty big beast, State of Origin. When you’ve been a supporter and a fan ... it’s so different again when you’re about to play in one. On game day the atmosphere ... I remember running out ... I’ll never forget it. It’s something you can only get playing State of Origin.”

Three days after the first game of this year’s series, Cordner will turn 26 years old, which may seem young for a player leading a team on rugby league’s pressure-cooker interstate stage. He has the maturity and runs on the board to be able to handle it, though. He made his debut for the Sydney Roosters back in 2011 and has since played a tick over 130 NRL games for the boys from Bondi Junction.

He has nine State of Origins to his name, dating back to that debut series in 2013. ▶



Ahead of last year's series, Cordner was picked to fill the void left by the retiring Paul Gallen, ahead of the likes of Sharks' enforcer Wade Graham, Bulldogs' prop Aaron Woods, and the man who most experts claimed was his main rival for the job, the ultra-consistent forward Josh Jackson from Canterbury. In a show of the type of bloke Jackson appears to be, he himself endorsed Cordner for the job via the media leading up to the new-skipper announcement.

Gallen's retirement from representative football still left a gaping wound in the inspirational leader stocks of the Blues' ranks. The thing about Gal was, he was battle-hardened. Coming into the Blues' squad back in 2006, he'd toiled away, still topping tackle counts and running metres, as arguably one of the greatest teams ever assembled – the Maroons unit, which took out eight-straight series – was just starting to hit its stride.

That he'd played just six State of Origins before being named skipper looked premature from a distance, but there would have been truckloads of trust shown in Cordner from then-Blues coach Daley, and the NSW board, that the kid from Old Bar would handle the step up. "I was the captain of my club team Old Bar Pirates," Cordner recalls. "I captained a couple of rep teams as



well. It's been there as a kid. It's something that I haven't, you know, said to myself, 'I'm going to be a leader, a captain.' I think it's just come on naturally with my footy up-bringing and the way I was brought up. It's helped me a lot with the qualities you need as a captain.

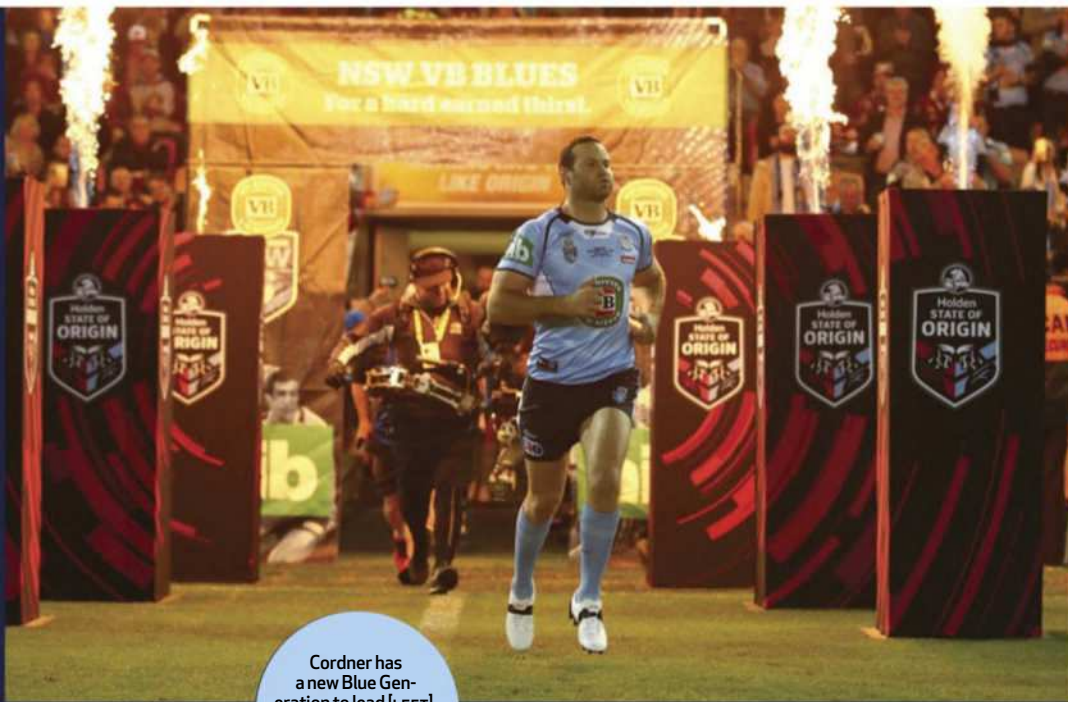
"There was a year there where I played up in age; could have been in under-12s when I was 11. Then there were some games where I used to back up and play in my brother's team after my game. He was two years older. So I played a lot of my footy playing up in age. Sometimes we didn't have a team in my age group. So I played up in age and had friends there. Often I would end up going

back down to my own age group but I still, every now and then, used to go up to my brother's team and play there.

"Looking back on it, it was pretty handy for what would end up happening later on. Then with the school rep football stuff, I always trialled a year early and got through there. I remember when I was 16, I made the NSW under-18s schoolboys team. And then when I signed with the Roosters, I was 16. I came down and was training with the NRL squad. I had a lot of growing up to do pretty early. When I was younger, when I was playing up in age, that helped me a lot with the transition."

The way Gallen led had an obvious influence on Cordner. "He had a lot of leadership qualities and a lot of respect from the playing group, which I admired. That's how he goes about his business. He's a very tough competitor. He says it how it is. If he says he'll do something, he's going to do it. What he said, he really meant. He led by his actions; he still does to this day. I loved playing with Gal. He's a really good bloke.

"I try and do my best in that area, but obviously playing under a guy like Paul Gallen, you'd be silly not to take a few things and implement them. In saying that, I'd like to think I'll do stuff my way as well. I'm still only young as a leader and captain; I'm still



Cordner has a new Blue Generation to lead [LEFT], along a path that is sure to be fiery, and furious.



From under-20s Origin, the kid from Old Bar has had the look of a future NSW leader about him.

“LAURIE TOLD ME HE WAS GOING TO PLAY ME. I WAS 21 AT THE TIME. MATE, I COULDN'T TELL YA THE EMOTIONS.”

learning along the way and growing. Hopefully I can do a good job again.”
 For Cordner, the burden of captaincy hasn't affected his approach on the field. “I haven't changed my game around Origin very much at all. I'll always go out and put in 100 percent effort for my team-mates. The only thing that changes is the responsibility of talking to the refs and rallying the troops when something needs to be said. Most of that is spur-of-the-moment stuff. It's not a hard job. That's just the way it is. Part and parcel of it all.”

Since making his first grade debut back in 2011, Boyd Cordner has developed into a vitally important cog of coach Trent Robinson's forward pack. It's why the foundation rugby league club re-signed him for another five years back in February, and why Cordner is the Roosters' co-captain alongside hardworking hooker Jake Friend. The Roosters need the best out of Cordner each and every week to be a force in the NRL, whether it's him hurting blokes and driving them backwards in stinging tackles, or trucking the ball upfield with the pill tucked under his wing. Then there's his lethal ability to be two passes off the ruck nearing the opposition's stripe. Most of his 40-odd tries in first grade have been a result of him running at spaces in defensive lines which are cracked and under pressure. It's a talent.

“I actually played five-eighth when I was growing up,” Cordner reveals. “It wasn't until I got a bit bigger that I went and played in the forwards. It's still good; you're in the middle, you have your hands on the ball a lot. Running the angles was always something, growing up, that I had in me. A lot of that stuff is instinct, timing and vision, but you do have to practise it over and over. It's not something that came to me overnight. I worked really hard on it.”

He'll reach his 150th first grade appearance this year, barring injury, which will look great next to his Dally M Second Rower of the Year award from the Roosters' premiership year of 2013. Then there's his 15 appearances for the Kangaroos as well.

Staying away from the doctor would be ▶



one of his main priorities this season, surely. He's battled with annoying calf strains throughout his NRL career, an injury which seems ho-hum but needs to be fully recovered from before a comeback is made. Easier said than done in the modern cut-throat, ultra-competitive NRL climate.

Highly respected rugby league scribe and legendary former coach Roy Masters revealed a theory recently in his newspaper column related to this season's topsy-turvy NRL ladder, which has regular high-flyers battling to get into a top eight half-filled with regular also-rans. Masters reckoned

the recent World Cup's brutality has cut short the vital preseasons of several of the game's biggest stars, and this affected their club's start to the new season.

Count Corder among them. He only returned to pre-season training in the New Year, having undergone a stem-cell injection to regenerate his knee, which suffered an injury that limited him to 18 games in 2017. Expecting these players, says Masters, to return to top form straight away after such an arduous tournament such as the World Cup is being far too ambitious.

In that vein, perhaps the only thing more

torrid than an Origin encounter is an NRL club game played in the days following a mate-vs-mate. As previously alluded to, these two forms of the game are quickly developing into different sports entirely. But there's not much of a grace period for Origin gladiators these days; NRL coaches are just like your boss and ours': they want results. If there's a player who has come back from Origin and all his limbs are still on, nine times out of ten they're playing at Leichhardt and helping their club mates out post an Origin encounter whatever its intensity. The stiffness and lactic and pain

5

INSPIRATIONAL NSW CAPTAINS



STEVE MORTIMER

ORIGINS: 9 (1982-85), AS CAPTAIN: 3
Canterbury-Bankstown's legendary halfback was captain of New South Wales when the Blues won their first-ever State of Origin series in 1985. His reaction to that initial series win – he collapsed to the Sydney Cricket Ground turf in celebration, relief and exhaustion – is iconic among the Blues' faithful.



WAYNE PEARCE

ORIGINS: 15 (1983-88), AS CAPTAIN: 10
A perfect footballer for State of Origin's rugged, exhausting demands, "Junior" was the ultimate rugby league athlete, but was renowned on the Origin stage just as much for his determination and competitive edge. Pearce, a Balmain Tigers legend, captained New South Wales to its very first clean-sweep series victory in 1986.



from Origin? That's all part of footy.

"If you go into Origin camp for ten days, you're in that bubble, that Origin bubble and the build-up," Corder shares. "Once you play, it could only be a couple of days until you're back in a Roosters jersey. It's demanding physically, but also mentally.

"But something I've always prided myself on is, I'm contracted to the Roosters and that's my club, my home; I want to turn up and do a really good job for them, too. It can get draining at times, but at the same time you have a job to do. The transition does get hard ... But you just have to do it. I like playing straight away. You haven't really got that soreness yet that hits you a few days after you play. I find it easier backing up straight away."

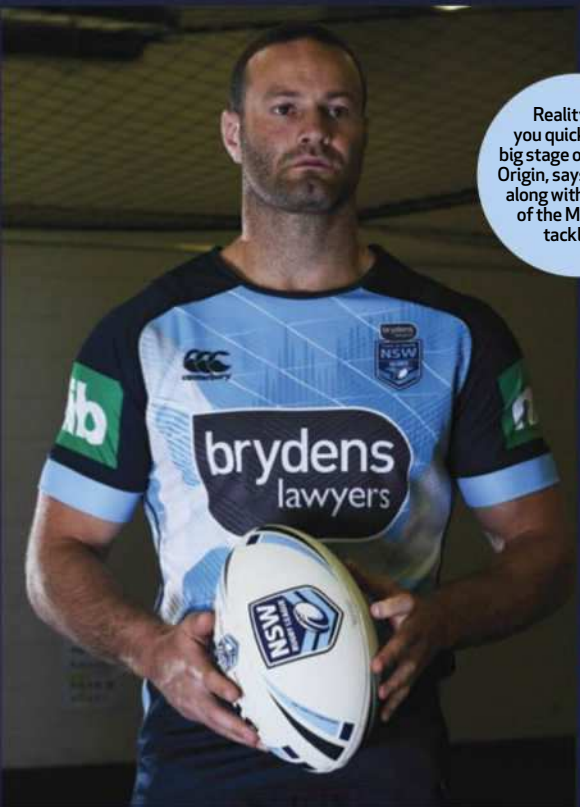
"IT'S DEMANDING PHYSICALLY, BUT ALSO MENTALLY."

That's what you want to hear as a New South Welshman, and a Roosters fan, for that matter: it's probably best to just get back out there, straight back into the action, no matter how epic the stage is and how dizzyingly high you are from where you started all those years ago.

"Sometimes when you run out, you think, 'Holy dooly, is this real?'" Corder offers candidly. "Since you were a little kid, that's

all you've wanted to do and there you are, out in the middle: a packed stadium, fans yelling. But you can't give yourself too much time for all that because before you know it you're getting smashed or running with the ball. You have to switch on and remain focused. But you do have your moments like that. Especially when you're out there singing the national anthem and you can spot your family in the crowd.

"I've been born and bred to love that blue jersey of New South Wales – and to hate Queensland. That's the way it's been since I was a kid, and that's the way it still is. That's what makes State of Origin so great, that healthy rivalry that's stronger than ever today. There's not much else like it anywhere else in sport." ■



Reality hits you quick on the big stage of State of Origin, says Corder, along with the rest of the Maroons' tacklers.



Laurie Daley

ORIGINS: 23 (1989-99), AS CAPTAIN: 13

A supremely skilled rugby league footballer and a fine on-field leader of men, the New South Wales Blues were in good hands whenever Loz was at the helm. The Junee-born Canberra Raiders legend put in a decade's service for his beloved state, expertly leading the team's attack around the park.



Danny Buderus

ORIGINS: 21 (2002-2008), AS CAPTAIN: 15

Newcastle Knights stalwart captained New South Wales from 2002 through to 2008, claiming two series wins ahead of the commencement of Queensland's epic eight-series winning run. Betsy may have been made to wait his turn at Blues service, stuck behind Luke Priddis and Craig Gower, but evolved into a highly inspirational and tenacious hooker when his chance finally arrived.



Paul Gallen

ORIGINS: 24 (2006-16), AS CAPTAIN: 16

In the middle of a years-long Queensland Origin onslaught, which saw them field arguably one of the best rugby league teams ever assembled, Cronulla Sharks legend Gallen left every fibre of his being out on the field over six series of leadership. Might not have been NSW's best player, but was definitely their most important during his years of service for the Blues.

WILL CHAMBERS

THE STORM, MAROONS AND KANGAROOS CENTRE DISCUSSES HIS JOURNEY FROM RUGBY TO LEAGUE, HIS COMPETITIVE STREAK AND LOOKS AHEAD TO ORIGIN IN 2018.

After returning from a stint in rugby union, you set yourself a goal to play representative footy – which you’ve done. What do you put that success down to?

When I came back, I really wanted to play Origin footy. I was sort of on the other side of the world and wanted to go home and give it one last crack, and leave no stone unturned and try to get that.

A lot of hard work went into it and I probably can’t thank Craig [Bellamy] and the coaching staff enough down here [at the Storm], who helped improve my footy. I guess I’ve become a consistent first-grader and I think that played the bigger part in going to that next level. You need to be consistently good week-in and week-out at clubland before you can start worrying about playing the elite level of Origin and playing for Australia. I also learned how much I love and miss rugby league at the same time.

Was there a moment where you felt like you reached that level of consistency?

You’re always trying to improve. You don’t have to look too far: Bill [Slater], Cam [Smith], Coops [Cronk] when he was here – they achieved everything five or ten years ago, but are still going around now. You’re never happy where you’re at. You always want to get better until the body says no more. Well, that’s when you’d probably call it a day. I’ve never been happy with where I’m at, and I’m always trying to improve and get better. When you’ve played Origin, it’s easy to sit there and think, “Oh yeah, I’m going okay,” but with Cam, Coops and Bill, every year they come back and want to be better, and go to a new level.

You seem like a real competitor on the field. Do you think that helps playing at Origin level?

Everyone that plays rugby league has

to be competitive, otherwise you just wouldn’t make it to the top level. Any sport you’ve got to be competitive. But yeah, I am quite competitive on the footy field. But it does help at the highest level – where you’re just making sure you know your role and do it for the team. It’s making sure we all know what’s going on and work together. It’s such a short period leading in [Origin or Tests]. I enjoy the battle of playing rugby league and the week-to-week battles.

What was it like being part of a series win for Queensland last year, and what are your thoughts ahead of the 2018 series?

It’s just special to be a part of Origin. It would be up there with playing for your country as the biggest achievement you can do. Last year we were lucky enough to achieve something special and do what we did and win in game three. It’s an exciting time ahead with the Blues changing the way they approach it.

We’ve got a good core group of players who are looking forward to another big series.

How has fatherhood changed your approach to footy?

I can speak pretty highly of it. It’s probably been the best thing for me, to be honest. I had an unbelievable last year and really enjoyed it, and Kiara has changed a lot of things. She’s at a young age now and still doesn’t know what dad does for work. Whether dad plays good or bad, she doesn’t really care. When I came home the other night after I missed that tackle on Luke Brooks, and she was already asleep, and my head was stuck there – I couldn’t stop thinking about it. In the morning, we went for a walk and got a coffee, and I forgot all about Luke Brooks and the missed tackle. It’s something that takes the pressures of footy away. You can just enjoy life. **– Andrew Marmont**

"It's an exciting time with the Blues changing the way they approach it. We've got a good core group ..."



PHOTO BY Getty Images



OUR ORIGIN PREVIEW

For our 2018 State of Origin preview, we turned to our weekly rugby league podcast to make sense of the game's great rivalry. How will NSW's new era go? Will a certain legendary Maroon get a call? Read on, and check out Dead In Goal at insidesport.com.au or your podcast app.



THE MOST ORIGIN THING WE EVER DID

James Smith: So in 2000, I went on a World Cup supporters' tour. The tour group got on so well that we had a number of follow-up reunion events. One of the reunions was in 2001; we caught up for Origin, the year that Allan Langer made his emergency SOS return to the Queensland side. The game was at the old QEII in Brisbane. The whole place feels as if it's temporary – you walk up to your seat and it's like you're stepping up on those steel seats you had at primary school. You could feel the grandstand move beneath you. It was awesome.

Alfie had the night of his life. The Blues scored one of the fastest tries in the history

of the game, after just 40 seconds, but then it was all Queensland from there. Anyway, we got flogged and I had my Blues jersey on and we were about to get on our bus to go back into the city and this little kid came up to me. He said, "Wow, do you support New South Wales, do ya?" And I said yeah, thinking what a friendly little local. And he said: "Wow, they really suck, don't they?" Until I hooked up with a Queenslander later on in life, it was my dominant memory of how "friendly" Queenslanders were ...

Jeff Centenera: I grew up outside of the two great states that constitute this rivalry, so I didn't get to watch it growing up. The first Origin match I really felt a part of was when I was going to uni in Queensland. I had been living overseas for

the previous five years, so I was looking forward to game one in 1995.

It just so happened that my first chance to watch this great showcase coincided with the Super League split. Almost the entire first-choice Maroons' side was out of commission, because they weren't aligned with the ARL. I remember there was a sense of hopelessness in Queensland – they felt they didn't even have a team, and it was being coached by Paul Vautin, no less.

Damned if they go out and win that match, 2-0. It was dour, but it produced a fair bit of Origin lore: Ben Ikin showing up and Fatty not knowing who he was, Billy Moore screaming "Queenslander", Gary Larson's ironman performance. It left me with an idea for all time about Origin – even when it's bad, it can still be pretty great.

WHAT WE'RE MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN ORIGIN 2018

JS: I've had a brain freeze ... What's mine again? Ha!

JC: Brad Fittler; what your idol is going to do as the newly installed mentor of the New South Wales Blues.

JS: This is first time, in a long time, that the series is going to be opened up to people for selection from Sydney's western suburbs. Last year, we lost another series, and there were no Penrith players, no Parramatta players, hardly any Wests Tigers. I felt the team wasn't representative of my corner of rugby league in NSW. It was just, once again, as it has been over the last decade, a very Sydney city-centric Origin team.

What Freddie will do is ... obviously he's got a different mindset to Laurie Daley. I think Fittler is going to be more of an attacking, win-it-all-costs coach. Whereas Daley, he was more focused on picking the players who should have been picked, like on reputation. It was just such a mainstream, big-profile side for so many years.

JC: I always felt Daley was very wedded to his philosophy of size and physicality. I think he kind of got it in his head that he couldn't beat Queensland playing football, so he picked big in every spot: big wingers, big centres, he had a big pack ...

JS: And how did that go for him? But Freddie: with his previous coaching experience in the NRL, he's also got recent form on the board to show, returning to coaching via Lebanon. Any coach that takes on a Lebanese team at a World Cup, there's gotta be something different going on in his head. Your regular coach doesn't get Lebanon and coach them, do they? Craig Bellamy doesn't do that.

JC: I've always been a sceptic about Origin coaching. Freddie, from the outside, does not seem to me the personality type to be a coach. But I've been convinced: Origin is a very different type of coaching. Even greats such as Bennett and Bellamy have only done okay. I think the demands of being an Origin coach, in terms of being **the face of the side** and being able to command the respect of the dressing room, are very different to what you might get in the day-to-day environment of the club. Which leads me to my question: can Freddie be the NSW Mal?

JS: Ah. He's got the potential to. The most successful coaches in Origin have been the most well-respected by the players. There's enough disconnect between Fittler and even the oldest player of the modern generation for there to be a

proper respect for what Fittler did on the field. **Fittler was just a masterful representative player.** And **he's got that sort-of-Shane Warne, ruthless winning mind that's covered up by a laid-back, one-of-the-boys thing and that's what people get thrown off by.**

JC: If NSW's problem in recent years has been that they've been wound too tight, Fittler is the antidote to that. I don't think there's any circumstance under which Freddie gets too worried.

JS: There may well be the odd booze-up, but the booze-up controversy last year



came in the context of "this is serious, we have to win this game".

JC: Yeah. This year's equivalent of **Dugan and Ferguson** won't have to go down the coast for a sneaky round. Freddie will be handing them the beers himself ...

JS: Ha! Yeah, they'll be there after training ... What are you most looking forward to?

JC: I'm looking forward to the Sunday match. I know this is kind of a nerdy thing to be looking forward to, the actual day it's going to be held on. But I want to see how it compares to its usual mid-week placement, because if it holds up, it has the potential to unlock a lot of different things that rugby league can do with scheduling, i.e. fewer club matches during the season. The counter-argument has always been that you can't do less, you need to have content because the broadcasters will never permit it. And let's face it, that's true. So if they can create a thing where Origin can be played on a Sunday, and then fill in the time around it with other representative fixtures, or our idea for a touch football pick-up tournament, for instance ...

JS: Or our idea of playing it on an oil rig. Okay, to make a call, do you think more or fewer people will watch Origin on television on a Sunday night?

JC: Less, but only slightly, because you have a bigger television crowd on Wednesday than on Sunday. People do things on weekends. **Like how Sydney people avoid going to NRL games.**

JS: The thing is, you're going back to the barbecue-before-the-game opportunity. It's going to be a smash hit. Do you go out on Sunday knowing there's an Origin game on? Nup, you change your plans.



READER QUESTION

Should anyone be eligible to play in State of Origin?

YES

JC: Or, mostly yes. Two lines of thought on this one: horse has already bolted; you've had players from all over the place in this game for years. We've got the Denis Carnahan song to tell us exactly that, for Queensland. But NSW hasn't exactly been innocent of this either. Second line of thought: what's the harm in separating Origin from rep football? I can't see the logic in Andrew Fifita being all right to play for the Blues one year, but not the next after committing to Tonga. Origin is great no matter who plays, but the series benefits for having the stars. Otherwise, it's on the path to City-Country.

NO

JS: It is not an all-star game. Using the all-star analogy may be the easiest way to explain Origin to outsiders, but it just isn't. A few years ago we were trying to come up with an argument as to why Sonny Bill should play. I don't think it needs an extra superstar because you've got the thing that is most important – it's one state up against another ... The Pacific Tests – there's your answer to outsiders playing Origin. Games featuring Tonga, Samoa, PNG, Fiji ... they can be on the same card as Origin, so that everybody fits into these annual, meaningful rep games.

Absolutely not. I mean, really?
– **Jon Tuxworth** @Tuxy81

I'd prefer to see an all-Australian Country v City match.
– **Andrew Ferguson** @AndrewRLP

Umm, but there has been Kiwis and PNG-born players on a number of occasions.
– **Mick Fong** @_midofo_

No not anyone. You should be good at footy to be eligible.
– **Former Legend** @Former_legend

NO! Only Qld and NSW. That's State of Origin. It's not called "State of Anyone". #NRL
– **Prof M Davis** @mdavisqlder

My hope is that eventually Origin loses its status as more players follow Fifita's lead by choosing Pacific nations & more players emerge from Victoria, WA etc.
– **Paul Michael Craig** @paulmac_78

Yes and it should be merit based with the criteria being length and thickness of your mo, girth and general roundness of your gut and how many cans you can down in a single sesh. It'd be between us and @Former_legend for the captaincy. #stateoforigin
– **dressingshed.com** @thedressingshed

The Origin concept has changed so much since its inception that it is natural that it continues to evolve. However, I would say that the minimum requirement is that players must have played a game in NSW or QLD before age 20 to qualify for selection.
– **Where the 'Hardt is** @WheretheHardtIs

I was going to draw the line at extra-terrestrials, but remembered ET is one of the Blues' greats.
– **Dave Smith** @STEEPCampaign

No, the NRL has lessened the requirements for Origin enough. I suspect, with Origin being played on stand-alone weekends along with other test matches, Origin may lose importance in the future.
– **James Cheeseman** @shaggy84329

TENTER-FIELD-ER, right? QLDers always countered with "Sterlo was born in Toowoomba". But his family moved when he was 2 and he played junior footy in Wagga. 1995 through SL in 97 was a clusterf due to most of the QLD players being SL aligned, they couldn't make up 17.
– **David O'Connor** @sportmediocrity

As long as the players don't come from my NRL club, I don't care who plays Origin (or the result for that matter). It's ridiculous the affect it has on the competition.
– **PursuitOfHoppiness** @jimkat2

No. I think the magic of the concept would be lost. Got diluted through necessity in SL year, letting Lam play. Inglis for Qld pushed boundaries, but within rules of the time. You want the passion for the state to remain supreme.
– **Jay Dwight** @JayD1313





REAR VIEW MIRROR

JS: It makes you feel a bit old to think that 2018 marks 30 years since Lang Park lost its mind – more drastically than it usually does – and showered the field with cans of beer in protest.

For the young-uns among you, there was about 20 minutes remaining in game two of the 1988 series. Blues bookend Phil Daley wouldn't let Maroons hooker Greg Conescu to his feet following a tackle. On his back,

“Turtle” Conescu struck out at Daley with his boots, Daley responded how you'd expect, and a brawl broke out. Nothing unique there. NSW referee, the very respectable Mick Stone, sent the two combatants to the bin.

Pleading Conescu's case throughout the mid-field trial was Queensland skipper Wally Lewis. With the camera shot filled with a nose to nose exchange between Stone and The King, Stone then did the seemingly unthinkable and sent Wally to the bin for

five minutes! The crowd went absolutely mental, throwing half-filled and full cans of beer onto the field. The match had to be stopped, with players from both sides retreating towards the middle of the pitch so as to avoid the many projectiles being hurled from the Cauldron's main grandstand. An irrelevant factoid about the match: Queensland eventually won 16-6. No beer was harmed during the making of this fiasco. After all, it wasn't actually beer, just cans of XXXX ...

ANYTHING WE'VE FORGOTTEN?

The Queensland halves' conspiracy

JC: Should Queensland reach game three with the series in the balance, and they're not happy, or have injury concerns, with their halves, how long until they send out the Bat-signal – which will be in the shape of Alfie Langer's head – for Johnathan Thurston? Or even Cooper Cronk, for that matter, but more likely JT. You know, pull on the old Maroon no.7 and help out the old state one more time.

JS: Yep. And if they do, I reckon he would answer it. In that emotional interview that he did with Erin Molan last year, she posted a question, and he didn't say no. He said “if I'm really needed” or something like that. I don't think the door's shut. I'd love to see it, actually.

JC: Because he wasn't on the field to finish last year, I think that makes this very realistic. Cronk is fine, he's done; he had the perfect send-off. But JT, there

would be a real itch for him to go out with boots on, not with dress shoes. They don't want to be on the fringe of the side and be honoured by team-mates who won it for them. No, they want to be on the field having won it themselves.

The thing that will keep them out of it is if Queensland wraps it up quickly, or the new halves combination looks fantastic. But

because we had Langer and Fittler do this, this example of yesterday's hero coming in and saving their state one last time – it's utterly realistic that this could happen for Thurston.

JS: Definitely. I have a theory – if North Queensland is not doing so well, it could be a way for JT to bring some positives to the season. Let's hope his shoulder holds up.



Shohei Ohtani

Occupation Baseball player for the Los Angeles Angels

Origin Oshu, Iwate Prefecture, Japan

Born July 5, 1994

Height 193cm

Weight 92kg

As an MLB rookie, first player to win two games as a pitcher and hit three homers since 1919; named to Japanese baseball's team of the year as a pitcher and hitter in 2016.

Status

I. MIND

Ohtani has been a sensation in his first season in American baseball, achieving feats not seen since a century ago when Babe Ruth was still playing as pitcher and hitter. For that, credit the phenom's quiet-yet-steely resolve – Ohtani insisted on doing both as he became a star in Japan. There was talk that he couldn't keep it up in the majors, which became louder as Ohtani endured a down pre-season. But he blew away any scepticism in his very first week, showing a remarkable ability to adapt to the new conditions with the Angels.

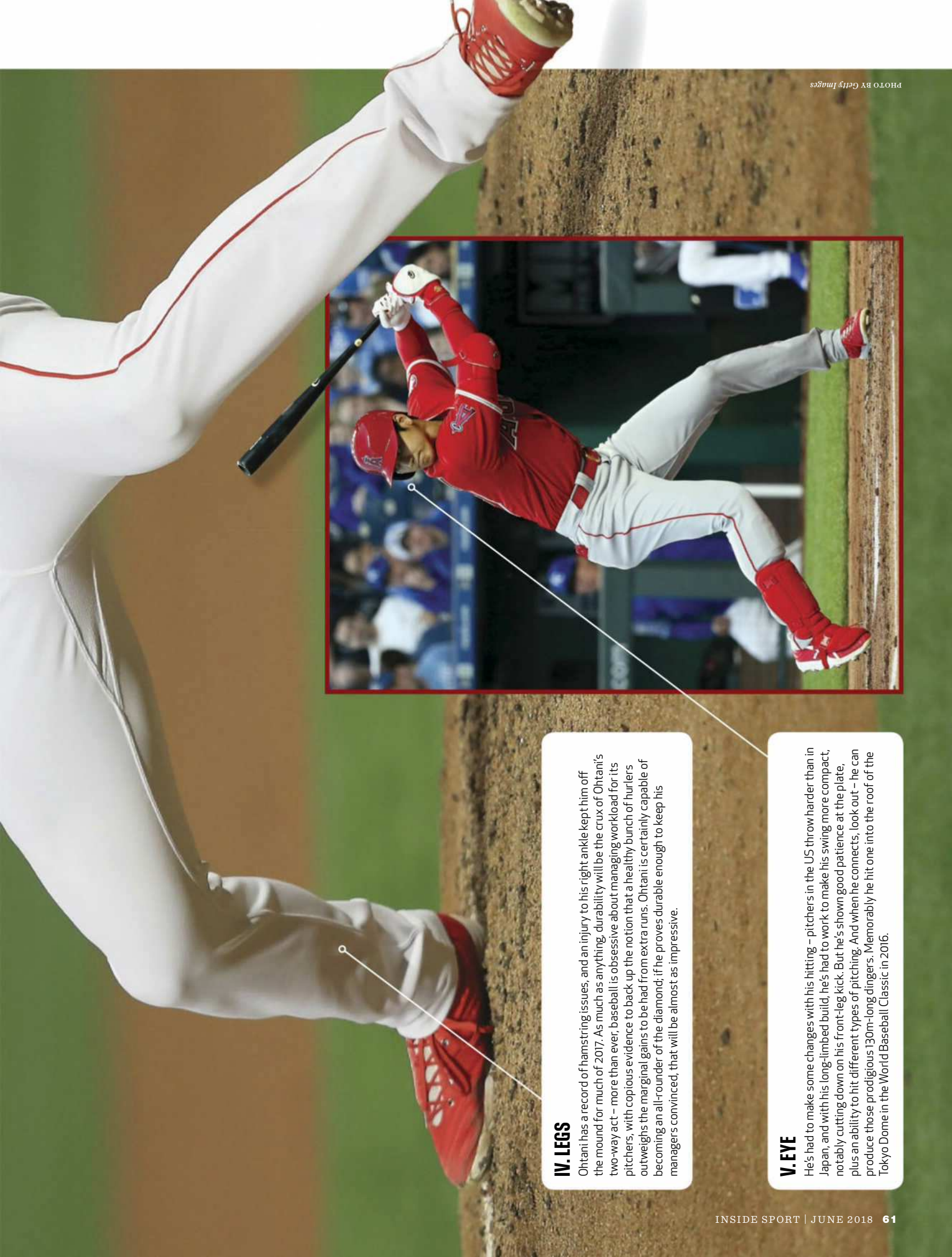


II. FRAME

One big reason he's accomplishing this – he's a natural physically. He's a 193cm-tall, throws-right, hits-left package of baseball athleticism. Scouts gushed that he rates among the most gifted power hitters and hard-throwing pitchers they'd seen, but never had a player combined the two. In his last year of school, he became the first Japanese amateur to throw 160km/h; a year later, he was playing professionally for the Nippon-Ham Fighters.

III. ARM

His pitching is thought to be slightly ahead of his hitting, as he's considered at worst a potential top-end starter. The velocity is well known (he's up to 165km/h) but it's his stuff that has turned heads: he has a terrific slider, and his late-diving splitter has been brutal on hitters so far. In his first home start, Ohtani produced seven perfect innings before allowing a runner, striking out 12.



IV. LEGS

Ohtani has a record of hamstringing issues, and an injury to his right ankle kept him off the mound for much of 2017. As much as anything, durability will be the crux of Ohtani's two-way act – more than ever, baseball is obsessive about managing workload for its pitchers, with copious evidence to back up the notion that a healthy bunch of hurlers outweighs the marginal gains to be had from extra runs. Ohtani is certainly capable of becoming an all-rounder of the diamond; if he proves durable enough to keep his managers convinced, that will be almost as impressive.

V. EYE

He's had to make some changes with his hitting – pitchers in the US throw harder than in Japan, and with his long-limbed build, he's had to work to make his swing more compact, notably cutting down on his front-leg kick. But he's shown good patience at the plate, plus an ability to hit different types of pitching. And when he connects, look out – he can produce those prodigious 130m-long dingers. Memorably he hit one into the roof of the Tokyo Dome in the World Baseball Classic in 2016.



TO PROTECT AND SERVE

HE'S ACCLAIMED AS THE BEST DEFENDER OF HIS GENERATION, ALREADY A LEGENDARY FIGURE IN RICHMOND LORE AND A MODEL FOR WHAT THE AFL WOULD WANT ITS FOOTBALLERS TO BE. YET THAT HARDLY BEGINS TO EXPLAIN THE EXCEPTIONAL CASE OF ALEX RANCE – AND IT DEFINITELY DOESN'T DEFINE HIM.

By **JEFF CENTENERA**

There's clear air these days at Punt Road, the kind in which a flag ripples. Next door, the MCG doesn't cast such an ominous shadow. At the entry to the club, the row of Richmond's premiership trophies no longer stands as something of a taunt – and the glass case at the end, still waiting to be filled with last year's addition, hints at the promise of what's to come.

This is airspace for Alex Rance: possibility, anticipation, a chance to shape what happens next. Not yet halfway through this AFL season, we're still trying to adapt to a world

where the Tigers – *the Tigers* – are reigning premiers. After last year's grand final victory, there's no reverting to the same old. "As much as I wanted to fight it," Rance tells *Inside Sport*, "it is a different feeling. And I'm going to embrace that; as a football club, part of our story now is the success that we've produced."

On an individual level, it's perfectly fine for Alex Rance to continue what he's been doing. The 28-year-old is regarded as the best defender in the AFL – the consensus is so widespread that you'd think "best defender in the AFL" is his tagline,

an automatic prompt that equates to Stephen Silvagni in his full-back-of-the-century heyday. In 2017, Rance earned selection to the All-Australian team for the fourth straight season, the only player – not Dangerfield, not Fyfe, not Buddy – to have that long a streak going.

He's a standout in a side memorably characterised on Twitter by former St Kilda boss Grant Thomas as "possibly worst group of players to win premiership" (he did mean it as a compliment, delivered on the back of his hand). He's a leader within the team – in one of the corners of Punt ▶



“PLAYERS ARE TOO SKILFUL THESE DAYS TO BE ABLE TO JUST GO ATHLETE VERSUS ATHLETE, YOU RUN, I RUN ... ALL THESE GUYS ARE REALLY PROACTIVE DEFENDERS AND IT BECOMES ALMOST A PART OF THE OFFENSE NOW.”



Road, there's a board listing winners of the Francis Bourke Medal, which the Tigers' playing group awards for upholding the team's core values. Rance also has four of these in a row, and five overall.

But put Rance's level of acclaim alongside that of team-mate Dustin Martin – he of the most gilded year in AFL history – and it becomes evident that defenders don't get any credit. Martin polled 36 votes to win the Brownlow in 2017; including the eight he earned last year, Rance has polled 31 for his *career*. It's the backman's lot: the Brownlow is out of reach, and there's no reverse-Coleman for preventing goals from being kicked.

When Rance was named captain of the 2017 All-Australians, it almost read like an apology – there's nothing else we can really give you as a defender, so have this. He laughs at the suggestion: “It is one thing that you do have to have – a good sense of humour – as a backman because there's not a defensive player of the year. But that's okay. I think you'll find generally that most defenders in the league are pretty humble, unassuming and would rather put other people first, pretty straight-down-the-line guys.

“Whereas, you need your forwards to have flair and be creative and maybe that's what made me different over the past few

Footy's best defender at work: tangling with stars such as Buddy or Toby Greene [ABOVE] or spoiling in the air or along the ground [RIGHT].



years. Maybe I did try a few things which made me a little bit flair-y and different. Sort of a cross between a forward mindset and the defender's mindset."

Indeed, Rance's thinking on defensive football goes well beyond negation. The word "proactive" comes up a lot. "Players are too skilful these days to be able to just go athlete versus athlete, you run, I run," he says. "Because the person with the ball is always going to put it to the advantage of whoever they're trying to kick it to. So you need to take something away from your opponent, whether it's physically or from a positioning point of view."

"So it's definitely an evolution, you see a lot of other guys like Michael Hurley, Jeremy Howe, Jake Lever, all these guys who are really proactive defenders and it becomes almost a part of the offense now. Because it's not just stop, spoil it out-of-bounds. It's: I win the ball back, we get it and we often score."

The Rance trademark, then, is not blotting out opposing star forwards *mano a mano*, in the classic style. As a great defender, he's also a thoroughly modern one. Fox Footy pundit Dermott Breerton notes the difference in the way current backmen play from previous eras: "In the '80s, if you peeled off and went to a secondary contest and left your man alone, no one was coming to give you a hand, so there was more one-on-one contests, more

of a lockdown-style nature.

"You didn't get the great assistance that you do now. And the great assistance allows Alex then to peel off and charge at the ball when it's directed elsewhere, because you know he's got a saturation of midfielders coming down to assist. And he's fantastic at doing it."

For an example, watch the opening term of last year's decider. Rance starts on Josh Jenkins rather than Adelaide's big wheel, Tex Walker, although it is hard to just pick one in the Crows' multi-pronged forward line. But as the action goes back and forth, it becomes apparent that Rance is not limited to an assignment: he marks coming off Jenkins, spoils Andy Ottens, walks Tex under a high ball on the wing to the advantage of Nick Vlastuin, winning a free off Eddie Betts in the forward pocket. If it seems like he's everywhere defensively, he's also in perfect concert with the back-six and those saturated mids coming to help. His efforts stalled Adelaide's early momentum and allowed Richmond to wrench the contest back. Rance earned some notices for the Norm Smith Medal as best on ground but, you know, backman.

It was the kind of cornerstone performance that Richmond has come to bank upon. And not altogether too bad for a player who, as Rance characterised himself, was a relatively unaccountable running midfielder as a junior. Growing

up in Perth and playing for Swan Districts, he had the fortune of Nic Naitanui as his ruckman. "I could literally blitz through any stoppage, I was usually bigger than most people, and he'd put it where I wanted it," he recalls. "So then you get this sort of false expectation that you're this really attacking-type player."

This act wasn't going to cut it in the AFL, where Rance was headed after being selected 18th in the 2007 draft. Richmond wasn't quite sure where to play him, and his key-position size deepened the confusion: the wing, midfield, even up forward. Rance struggled with his footballing identity, and his play suffered for it. Tigers assistant coach Justin Leppitsch, a defensive bulwark for the Brisbane Lions' three-peat winners, had a suggestion. "Lepper came along and said, 'Let's just try and win as many one-on-one contests as we can.' And then let's go from there."

It all seems natural in retrospect. "I think it plays to my strengths in being quite a tenacious, aggressive, competitive-type player," Rance says. "I need to scrap, I'll always fight to the end. It was probably born out of those years where I struggled to stay afloat. I needed to give everything I had because I wasn't super-skilful."

"It just almost seems right now, that I see the game the way I do. And it almost comes like I couldn't imagine life any differently."

There's no small irony in Rance's big ▶





picture. Because only three years ago, the AFL's best defender of his era wasn't sure he wanted to keep on playing at all.

With the way he goes about defending, it's no shock that Alex Rance has a mind for creative disruption. He has an entrepreneurial bent, a taste for practical jokes and goes full-bore in acquiring hobbies. One member of the Richmond training staff says Rance is one of those players he has to prepare answers for, because he'll always ask "why?"

Rance started studying landscape architecture, but dropped that for carpentry – "it was really backbreaking; I couldn't do that as well as football". He moved on to real estate, but didn't find it fulfilling. He got a pilot's licence, enjoyed it the most of his extracurriculars, but found it to be a sinkhole for money. He's taken a particular interest in his boot brand Xblades, the Australian company which signed him as a young player and maintained the relationship to this day. He tried building an app – he's always got ideas for apps – that would track and map your goings on a night out, but it tripped too close to breaching privacy rules.

There's a profound sense of more-than-footy about Rance, which ties in with another of his defining traits, the one he's probably best known for beyond his sporting prowess – his religious belief, as a member of the Jehovah's Witnesses. While Bible-based, the faith veers from the Christian mainstream: it does not venerate the cross, or celebrate Christmas or Easter;

it has no clergy, as every adherent to the faith is expected to spread the word, going door to door.

Jehovah's Witnesses engage with the world, but on terms that require a delicate balance. Even as they're viewed as somewhat exotic – for views such as their ban on blood transfusions – they're not exactly withdrawn. There's a number of public figures among the Witnesses: the pop star Prince, famously, and in sport, tennis's Williams sisters.

It is unusual, though, in the context of an AFL star. In this secular age, any kind of Australian footballer talking about the influence of his religion is an anachronism (rugby league's Polynesian Mormons are about the only ones who can readily relate). So when word filtered out that Rance had considered quitting at the end of the 2014 season, only 25 years old and a newly minted All-Australian, the footy narrative was caught on the hook: was Rance retiring because of his faith?

"I think it probably was a little bit of a hook, but at the same time, I had to acknowledge that being a Jehovah's Witness is part of me, and it's made me the person that I am," Rance says. "I wasn't forced into it and I believe that the values and upbringing that I've had have brought me to where I am today. So I have to pay that as much respect in the decision-making process as what it was.

"There's still part of me which is torn between: am I really just putting myself on a pedestal for my own self-gratification? Or am I actually doing this to make a difference? And in such a competitive





environment, which football is ... I physically have to tackle someone to the ground and make them less than me, which does really tear at some of my moral fabric. So that's the constant line which I have to walk with my faith and my values."

Self-awareness is no boon to the sporting great, always seeking constant improvement and the next victory for no other reason than they're there. Rance's level of introspection is made more unusual for his background – he was born into elite football, even as he questioned it. His father Murray won three premierships in the WAFL, played 97 matches in the VFL for Footscray and West Coast, captained the Eagles, and was a notable defender in his own right. Rance grew up thinking this life was natural. "I could go into the West Coast change-rooms, whenever I wanted to, Dad was really good mates with John Worsfold, Mick Malthouse, I had Scott Cummings pick me up from school – like all these things where these people were part of my life, which I just sort of took for granted. Doesn't everyone have these type of friends that do this as a job?"

But even with the head-start, adjusting to life in the AFL in his first few years was difficult. Rance grappled with how to be his authentic self, the hale fellow who felt he needed to give everything emotionally for his team-mates. The elite athlete's monomania began to set in. "I'd come home and I'd just be a shell," he says. "My wife, my family, everyone else would just be like, they wouldn't see the true me. When we'd go to functions, all the boys would be like, 'Aw, Rancey, he's such a laugh, he'd be such

"I PHYSICALLY HAVE TO TACKLE SOMEONE TO THE GROUND AND MAKE THEM LESS THAN ME, WHICH DOES REALLY TEAR AT SOME OF MY MORAL FABRIC. SO THAT'S THE CONSTANT LINE WHICH I HAVE TO WALK."

a handful at home.' And they're like, 'What do you mean? He just sleeps all the time.'

"And so that's when it really clicked with me: how is this fair? How is this fair to the rest of my life that I'm giving so much of me to this one element which seems so selfish, and then the rest of my life is suffering as a result? I was lucky that I have a loving, supporting family who allowed me to find that life balance."

When Rance reflects upon the period, it was a coming-of-age, if a strange one. Leaving footy at the point he was about to enjoy a fruitful prime would have been a mistake. But as he puts it, in a *Sliding Doors* sense, without the realisations he arrived at during that time, he wouldn't have become the player he is today.

He's settled the question of footy versus faith – in his formulation, his play conflicts, but his leadership conforms. "When you have a faith, you no longer live for yourself. You live in gratitude for the opportunity to be alive – you were created. And so naturally, you try and pass that on.

"To have conviction for who you are and not be ashamed of your faith, that definitely ties into that self-belief message. You have to ask yourself: 'Why am I doing this? Why am I going knocking on people's doors and telling them about a positive hope for the future? Do I really believe it myself?' And to be able to talk to people about that, I think takes a tremendous amount of self-

belief and conviction and self-confidence. And so then, you can apply that to football."

Having answered these questions for himself, Rance finally landed on a project – he started a school. The Academy, based in Essendon, offers a two-year program for 16- and 17-year-olds that re-creates the workday environment of an AFL club. Alongside studying maths, language and technology, students train in football skill development and fitness. There's a strong vocational edge to the curriculum – lots of emphasis on life skills such as finances and community service. If The Academy's products don't end up in the AFL, and they're given no guarantee they will, they at least are set on the path of a passion.

Ask Rance about education and he lights up – you get the sense that he wasn't satisfied with his own, although he disagrees. He was the type that couldn't wrap his head around subjects he wasn't interested in, or teachers he couldn't relate to. Footy, that great pedagogical tool for generations of boys (and now girls – The Academy has brought in its first female class this year), can serve as a means to goals that aren't just a set of four, tall sticks.

"It is hard because the world does perpetuate the same sort of mindset," he says. "You're a footballer, it's not going to last forever – I'll go do a trade. You're a footballer, it's not going to last forever – I'll just go and be a coach. Or do the media. ▶



“WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT THE GREATEST FABLES, WHAT YOU LEARN AT THE END IS A PRINCIPLE. YEAH, WE WON A PIECE OF TIN, AND SO MANY PEOPLE STRIVE FOR THAT AND FORGET ABOUT THE MORAL OF THE STORY. WHAT IS THE MORAL OF THE TALE THAT WE TOLD LAST YEAR?”

Or I'll do a uni degree. Instead of actually using self-reflection to ask: what do I want out of life? What makes me great and really fulfils me?

“I answered those questions with *The Academy*, because the reason why I come to the football club every day is I love working with young people. I love trying to be a leader and trying to help them be great.”

Next project: Alex Rance has written a children's book. This is not unusual by AFL player standards (Brendan Fevola had a couple). It is about the Tigers' own fairy-tale year, although told more like a fable, according to Rance.

“When you think about the greatest fables, what you learn at the end is a principle,” he says. “Yeah, we won a piece of tin, and so many people strive for that and forget about the moral of the story. What is the moral of the tale that we told last year?”

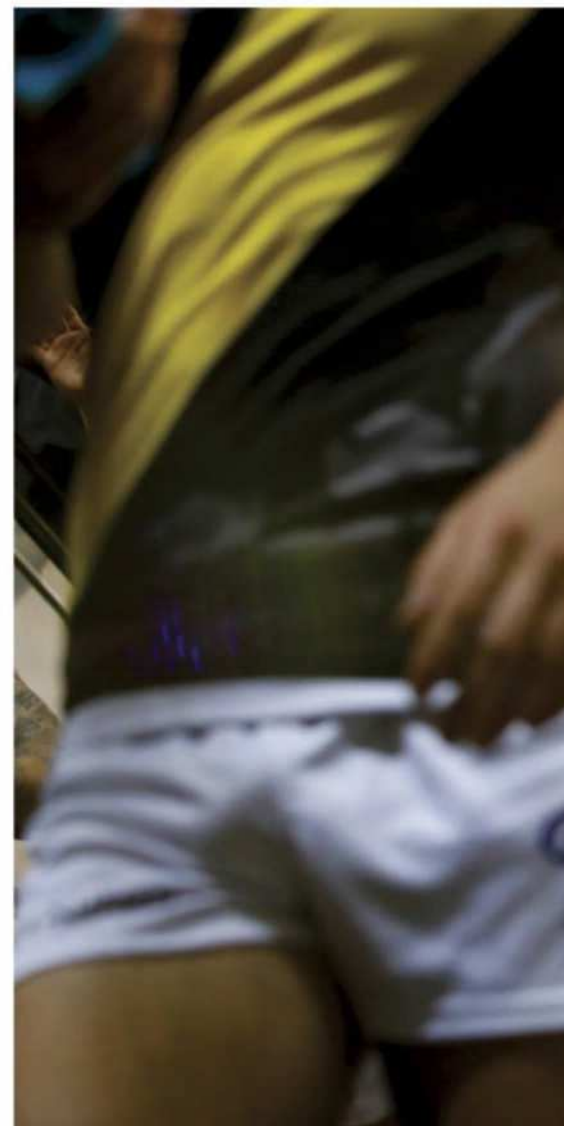
“There were multiple peaks and troughs of the season. Being smashed at Etihad by St Kilda, that's the greatest test of the hero of the story. Are you worthy to try and slay the dragon? When I reflect and think about what I learned from last year, that's far more valuable than a cup or a piece of tin.”

There's a finite quality to Richmond's

premiership – that after 37 years, a wait that seemed longer because of the exasperation of its supporters, winning just this one makes everything good. Rance could retire now, one suspects, and the denizens of Tigerland wouldn't resent him at all (maybe).

But there's always a season after, and at time of writing, Richmond had at least avoided the year-after pitfalls that claimed the Western Bulldogs, having banked some impressive wins to sit at the top of the ladder. Rance says the team had avoided the pressures of the title by sticking to process: “There's no real hunter-hunted paradox going on – it's still just doing what we do.”

When you're the best backman in the game, you're pretty much used to opponents coming at you. But for the man who almost walked away, the prospect of defending new territory surely means that something has changed. “The next challenge is: how do you do it again?” Rance says. “Because the story is different. You are now the hero at the top of the castle with all the villains trying to get you. So how does that story then look, and how can you draw on those memories and weapons of your mind to defend yourself from that?” ■





DEFEND IN NUMBERS

Quantifying defence is an intricate task in any sport – how, indeed, do you count something that doesn't occur? Alex Rance has a rule of thumb to gauge his performance: spoils and possession gains. "I'd sort of come up in my own mind with the number 20. So if you get 20 spoils and possession gains in a game, you have had a pretty good game," he says. "A player can have 15 spoils and five intercept possessions and that's a really good game; if they have 15 intercept possessions, that's borderline elite." Here's a statistical sampling of the AFL's top key defenders ...

	SP	IM	CD00
Alex Rance (Ric)	8.3 (5th)	3.8 (3rd)	8 (1st)
Phil Davis (GWS)	8.6 (4th)	3.2 (7th)	6 (2nd)
Daniel Talia (Ade)	7.4 (7th)	2.2 (19th)	5.6 (4th)
Harris Andrews (Bri)	9.4 (2nd)	2 (22nd)	3.6 (18th)
Jeremy McGovern (WC)	5.2 (27th)	4 (2nd)	3 (29th)
Michael Hurley (Ess)	3 (49th)	3 (8th)	3 (25th)

Per-game average, bracketed figure is overall positional rank.

Key: SP = spoils, IM = intercept marks, CD00 = contested defensive one-on-ones



From merry prankster [FAR LEFT] to All-Aussie on the edge [ABOVE LEFT], Rance is now a Richmond luminary with a precious piece of tin.



MASTER SWITCH

As a player, Brad Thorn won everything worth winning, in two codes no less. Having achieved the near-impossible in his segue from league to union, he now embarks on another crossing – from the unbreakable man-in-the-middle to nurturing sideline sage.

By **MATT CLEARY**

Brad Thorn left nothing on the training paddock but blood-flecked scabs. He'd do extras on extras. In the heat, in the rain, in the sideways sleet of Dunedin, didn't matter. Long as it hurt. If there was pain, he was gaining something. He was evolving as a player and man. Thorn didn't so much test himself out of his comfort zone as run around in the nude in zones full of gravel and pointy sticks and leopards. And from all this flagellation grew a legend: The Man Who Played Forever. Brad Thorn is rugby's Father Time.

He turned up to training with Canterbury Crusaders early in 2001 not knowing anyone or – importantly – how to play rugby union. But he was keen to learn, and to prove and ingratiate himself. At the end of a fitness session, he'd rip

off another fitness session. Just him, alone, running up the field, hitting the deck, getting up, running, and repeat. It was like there was a sergeant major in his ear. Drop! Get up! Run, you bastard! His new team-mates looked out from the sheds and wondered: what the hell is the mad Mungo doing?

The Crusaders of 2001 were New Zealand's finest. They'd won three-straight Super Rugby titles. They were full of All Blacks. And when Thorn turned up, this well-known league man from across the ditch, the locals weren't like, "Hurrah! Brad Thorn is here!" Good as he'd been in league, as "famous" as he was in flashy bloody Aussie, taciturn South Island types weren't enamoured. Indeed they were, well, a bit mean to him. ▶





A Bronco buck [LEFT], Thorn dealt out the physical stuff in Origin for Queensland.

“At the time there was quite a lot of animosity between the rugby codes,” says Thorn. “The guys I was playing with ... it wasn’t rosy.”

Thorn crossed the Rubicon because his old man, Lindsay, a Kiwi, a watch-maker and his best mate, had planted the seed prior to his death in 1994 when Thorn was just 19. As union went professional, the seed remained dormant but it was always there. Even when Thorn was winning premierships with the Brisbane Broncos, playing for Queensland and Australia, the black jersey of New Zealand rugby, and all that it meant, remained an itch he wanted to scratch. So over the pond he went. He was 25. It was like being new in the under-10s.

“I was clueless at rugby,” he says. “I was thrown into Super Rugby after four weeks of training. I got there in January! It’s a really complicated game. In league, my role was pretty straightforward: run hard, hit hard. It was humbling, frustrating.”

He didn’t want to be there. He lived in a one-bed flat. There were times he’d wake up and not want to train. He pined for his girlfriend in Brisbane. He’d built an idea of New Zealand from his childhood memories. But New Zealand wasn’t how he’d imagined it.

The Crusaders played him at No.8 because he looked like one. But it’s a reasonably technical position: back of the scrum, the running lines, all that. Thorn had no idea. “He ran around the field like an over-muscled ostrich,” reported a NZ newspaper. His team-mates continued to think he was hopeless. They wouldn’t throw him the ball in the lineout.

“I arrived with three goals: To see if I

“I WAS CLUELESS AT RUGBY ... IN LEAGUE, MY ROLE WAS PRETTY STRAIGHTFORWARD: RUN HARD, HIT HARD. IT WAS HUMBLING, FRUSTRATING.”

enjoyed rugby, to see if I was any good at it, and to see if I enjoyed living in New Zealand. And for the first six months the answer was ‘no’ to all of them,” Thorn told the paper.

But he’d made his bed. And he persevered. He saw the year out. Ended up in the second row, found solace in scrums. He played some club rugby, some NPC. End of the year, he was picked on potential for the All Blacks’ spring tour, which rubbed many noses wrong. He was still relatively clueless. “Everyone else was playing footy, I was learning on the run.”

But he was getting there.

He found a niche – the scrum: eight men; a common goal. He enjoyed the technicality of it, the physicality, the smarts, the power of one eight-man machine. Tight-head props grew to respect his ballast – you probably weren’t going backwards with big Brad behind you. And around the ground he was the same big-bodied belter. He was a presence on the park. Even feared.

“The physical stuff was always pretty good,” he says. “By the end of 2001 I reckon I was definitely starting to get a feel for it. I loved the scrummaging. I was getting a handle on lineouts. There was progress.”

Thorn told NZ rugby he didn’t want to go on the tour but they picked him anyway. He’d decided on a sabbatical to “sort some

things out” and get married in 2002. He didn’t want to sign for two years and take someone else’s spot. It earned him equal parts respect and incredulity. All Blacks great Stu Wilson described it as “a kick in the guts to all the blokes who had worn the black jersey and the thousands of others who had dreamed of it”. Team-mates wondered anew: what’s the mad bastard doing? The last bloke to turn down a black jumper, Greg Denholm in ’77, was never asked again.

Brad Thorn was. In the summer of ’02-’03 he worked on being a lock. To improve his balance, Crusaders coach Robbie Deans stood him on a fence post like the Karate Kid and threw shoes to him. He made the All Blacks squad for the ’03 World Cup. By ’05, he was back at the Broncos. In ’08, he was an All Black again. There was another World Cup, which the All Blacks finally won. Thorn cried on the field with relief. He hadn’t enjoyed it. It was a job, not a game.

Two weeks later, Thorn was playing for Munakata Sanix Blues in a near-empty ground in Japan. So revered was the famous All Blacks giant that a dozen team-mates would follow him into the gym. There were so many that the coach asked him to cap it – the real fitness guy was losing face.

Aged 37, Thorn played for Leinster in

Heineken Cup, and won the comp. Aged 38, he turned out for the Highlanders, played his 100th Super Rugby match, and won the comp. Aged 40, he announced his retirement. Aged 41, he ran out for Queensland Country in the National Rugby Competition. The Queensland Reds thought about signing him, offered him a coaching gig instead. He looked after the under-20s and Queensland Country (who, yes, won the comp).

And so, after 462 games and 17 titles, the indomitable Brad Thorn finally stopped playing. And now he's coach of the Reds. And you wonder who'll crack first.

Lindsay Thorn had had enough. His 16-year-old son Bradley was talented, had played junior rep footy. But he was lazy, "cool", insouciant in that way teenagers can be. He'd drift in and out of games – a big run, then a 20-minute bludge. He wasn't a great one for training. So Lindsay sat him down and laid down a law: unless the boy got off his arse and immediately ran the hill track around nearby Albany Creek state forest, he could forget about footy. Lindsay would never drive him to a game again. Tough love? Too right. And out the door the boys ran, into the hills, with the old man's

metaphorical boot up his arse. And he ran and ran and ran, right into legend.

That Brad Thorn's been able to play top-level league and union for nearly 23 years points to discipline the military would approve of. Thorn's ridiculous longevity and consistency comes down to training. And not just the ability to lift 250kg in the gym (which they say he still can) but flexibility, discipline, preparation. Thorn notes that 30-year-olds today are getting knocked around, back end of their careers, and deciding to get into stretching. Thorn laid a platform from day dot.

"I've always trained, always loved it. Always enjoyed the work. I like a positive mindset. I'm keen to learn stuff. Not drinking alcohol for seven years was a factor. But there's not like a secret to it. It's about being diligent. You build a base of fitness that keeps you going."

Thorn turned up at Brisbane Broncos, lanky, 18 years old, and got physical with the hard men: Glenn Lazarus, Trevor Gillmeister, Gavin Allen, Andrew Gee, who called him "Strongy". But there was a party crew, too, at Brisbane. And Thorn enjoyed that aspect quite a bit.

Thorn admitted that he drank, chased the ladies, did the things young guys do when they're handed more money than anyone in their old neighbourhood earned.

But in the meantime, he continued to grow, upwards and outwards, marrying size with ability and the work ethic of a zealot. He was the Broncos' rookie of the year in 1994, clubman of the year in 2007. He played 200 first grade games, won four premierships, was a massive cog in the team's engine room, what they call "the middle" today.

Thorn's father died at the end of '94 and Wayne Bennett became Thorn's greatest influence as a player and coach. Even if "there were times I wasn't very keen on him" smiles Thorn. "But you're a different person at different times of your life. Whether he brought out the best in me, I don't know. But we won four grand finals, had some great players and really good times."

More would follow. Brad Thorn won everything.

There's a character in crime writer Lawrence Sanders' detective mysteries called Mick Ballou, an Irish gangster from Hell's Kitchen described as "rough-hewn from granite", like an Easter Island statue come to life.

He could be describing the hero of our tale, Bradley Carnegie Thorn.

Carnegie? His mum's maiden name. Thorn mostly takes after the Munro side ▶



Learn-
ing union
was tough sled-
ding, but he was
back in black in
Sydney
[BELOW].



After full-on grabbing a World Cup victory, Thorn ended his career at Old Country [BELOW RIGHT].



of the clan, though. He's seen photographs of these people, lined up like a footy team. They're huge, arms akimbo. And not just the men. Aunties, grandmas, all big units and mighty forearms. "Granma was what you'd call a hefty woman," smiles Thorn.

Inside Sport meets the embodiment of Ballou in the Reds' hotel lobby before the derby match with NSW Waratahs. If the late Darrell Eastlake looked like his voice – booming, "big", hyper-enthused – Brad Thorn sounds like a man who's played footy for 23 years. He's raspy of throat and craggy-featured.

Halfway through our chat, a hotel guest, an adult man of perhaps 35 years, meekly interrupts us to ask for a photo with his infant. Thorn politely explains that he's doing an interview, and that he'll sort him out shortly. The man apologises profusely. "He's very excited," his wife explains.

Perceptions, stereotypes – Thorn's battled both. That he's just a giant Mungo, in a man without creativity or poetry. Like the Rugby Australia board member who couldn't countenance Ewen Mackenzie (a front-rower!) coaching the Wallabies, there are some who didn't – probably still don't – see Brad Thorn as a coach. How could he? goes the cynical conceit. He's nowt but a big dumb leagueie.

A lock! What would he know?

Like all stereotypes, there are elements of truth in all this. Thorn did enjoy contact, you bet. It was his thing. One of them, anyway. But like Shrek, the man has layers. Yet given his playing style, he's had to battle against negative stereotypes. To convince people he can coach. He's doing it now.

"I've never had to with the players," he says. "But with ... others I've had to get past the type of player I was, I suppose. People think you'd coach a certain way given you played a certain way. They might think I'm 'old school', an advocate of the old ten-man rugby. And sure, you run hard, hit hard. That's a given. But I want blokes to play the game, to enjoy footy, to play to their skills. That's why we picked them."

All of Thorn's games with the Broncos were played under Wayne Bennett. All of his State of Origin games, under Bennett. So the great, old cagey one rubbed off. Ask Thorn about what he learned as a coach from the great slit-mouthed Svengali, and Thorn says Bennett instilled discipline and had blokes playing for each other. He says another strength of Bennett's was that he got to know players. He cared.

"I'm big on that, on blokes caring," says Thorn. "It's about caring for your mates. That's who you're out there with. I want

blokes to care about their team-mates and what everyone's trying to achieve. That's a non-negotiable. If you don't care, I don't want you here."

And have Thorn's young Reds taken to "caring"? "They weren't going to be there if they weren't," says Thorn. "We've trained hard, played some really good, attacking footy. I like blokes to express their skills. Yes, I like blokes playing tight. But I love blokes playing ad lib."

Like ... Quade Cooper? *Inside Sport* didn't ask Thorn about the exiled No.10 for two reasons. Firstly, by the time this magazine is in your hands, Cooper could be anywhere. He could be in Italy. Or Brazil. And secondly, Thorn has been asked about the return of Cooper upwards of 20 times and offered up nothing other than "we're going in a different direction". Even when pressed, there's not even a variation on it. You get those words in that order. That's the messaging. And that's it. And all you'll see of Quade is tooling about for Souths Magpies on the YouTube.

Thorn's doing it his way. And we are gradually learning that the Way of Thorn the coach is much like the player: direct, honest and non-negotiable.

At the Reds' season launch, Thorn opined that the Queensland team should

be “embarrassed” by some of their play in 2017. Ask Thorn today how his players’ feelings copped that appraisal, and he smiles again. “Mate, I don’t really care.”

Thorn doesn’t hold much truck with “generational” mores – Gen-Ys, Millennials, all that. He says rugby is more professional than in his day and that social media, which he’s not a huge fan of, can pile up and grow a life of his own. But otherwise “boys will be boys”.

“Players are players, mate. There are guys full of energy, ambition. Sometimes they need boundaries on stuff. But I just try to encourage them. My role, individually and as a team, is to help them reach their potential. It’s about giving guys opportunities to grow. The measure of my success, I think, won’t be so much wins and losses, but how much I impact upon them as men.”

Yet given Thorn’s long history of success, you wonder how a sustained stint of losing

(albeit while “rebuilding”) might affect the man. He’s never known it, after all...

“You’ve also got to realise where they’re at. I had my own experiences as a 19-year-old at the Broncos, being pitched straight into Super Rugby, where I was a work-in-progress. I’ve been pretty open about what I expect. We’ve got a whole heap of works-in-progress, individually and as a club.”

After a bright start which included wins over the Brumbies, Bulls and Jaguares on the road in Buenos Aires, the young Reds fell to second-last in the Australian conference, ahead of winless Sunwolves of Japan. They lack options off their No.10, Jono Lance, and won’t countenance the return of Quade Cooper or Karmichael Hunt, who don’t appear to fit with Thorn’s youth-oriented “culture”.

And thus Reds fans can expect more of the same, this year and probably next, as Thorn brings up his under-20s and assorted young fellows from the

Queensland Country squad which won the 2017 National Rugby Championship.

And you wonder, given at time of writing an Australian Super Rugby team hasn’t beaten a Kiwi rugby team since what feels like 1972, what the All Black Thorn and his intellectual property can tell us.

So, Mr Thorn, once of the highlands of Central Otago, can Australia consistently beat the All Blacks? We can, according to Thorn. It’s just that ours is a work-in-progress. “In New Zealand they have a pyramid-sort-of system, like Australia’s cricket system, in which grade clubs feed Shield teams, which feed the Test team. But the Kiwis have a fourth level – a base of very strong club rugby. So every coach and player comes from a strong club competition. That feeds the NPC, which feeds the Super teams, and up to the All Blacks.

“That’s why the NRC is so important for Australian rugby. The jump between Super rugby and club rugby is massive. And the Kiwis have had that system in place for 130 years. The NRC is a bridge.”

Sure, but no one wants to watch it. “You’ll get tribalism, it’ll come,” asserts Thorn, brooking no argument. “Queensland Country, by the end of the year we had a good little following. Those people will be back. They’ll bring people. Just needs time.”

Father Time would know. ■

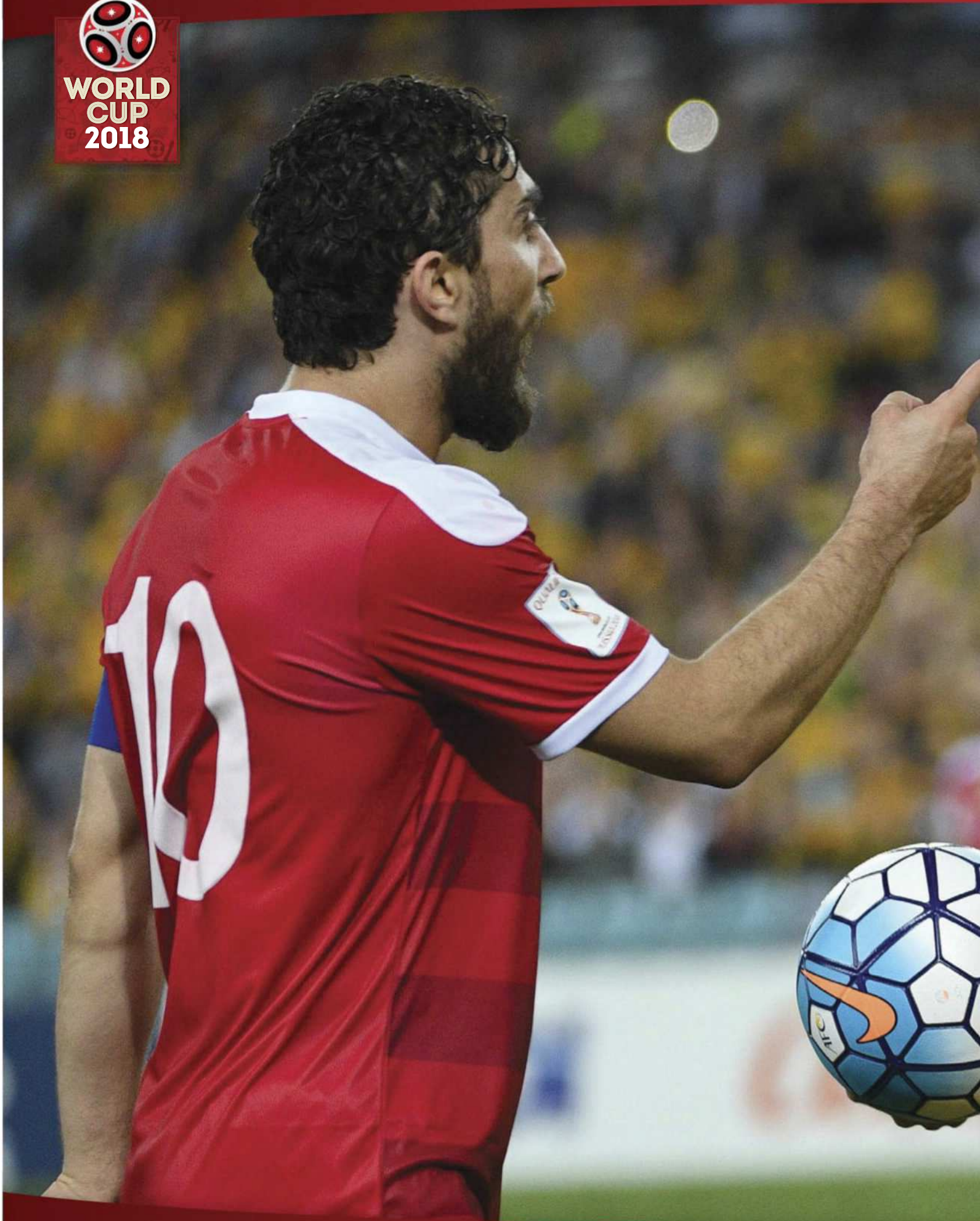
“PEOPLE THINK YOU’D COACH A CERTAIN WAY GIVEN YOU PLAYED A CERTAIN WAY. THEY MIGHT THINK I’M ‘OLD SCHOOL’ ... AND SURE, YOU RUN HARD, HIT HARD. THAT’S A GIVEN. BUT I WANT BLOKES TO PLAY THE GAME.”

As coach of the Reds, Thorn has laid down the law – Quade and Karmichael can tell you that.





**WORLD
CUP
2018**



JOKER AT THE BACK

THE SOCCEROOS' RESIDENT LARRIKIN TRENT SAINSBURY IS NO LAUGHING MATTER. THE DEFENDER IS SHAPING UP TO BE AUSTRALIA'S SUPREME LINCHPIN IN RUSSIA AND BEYOND.

By **JOHN DAVIDSON**

Two moments stand out clearly from November 15, 2017 when Australia finally booked its place at the 2018 FIFA World Cup. The

Socceroos had dominated Honduras in the second leg in Sydney before a packed ANZ Stadium, and celebrated a fourth successful World Cup qualification in a row. It hadn't all gone to plan, with tense home-and-away play-offs against Syria and Los Catrachos, and later head coach Ange Postecoglou would bizarrely fall on his own sword with their place in Russia secure.

But all that mattered was that the green and gold would be there. There wasn't quite the outpouring of emotion at the same arena that we saw in 2005, when 31 years of pain and hurt ended. But it was particularly special for Trent Sainsbury, who bolted into the stands once full-time was called. There, he embraced his father Scott, a man who is his hero, role model and best mate all rolled into one.

The other side of Sainsbury's character came via pictures of the Socceroos' dressing room. Champagne and beer flowed as the party kicked off. There, television cameras picked up the central defender stripped down to his underpants and skolling a beer from a football boot, a "Soccer-shoey", before tipping another beer on the head of Football Federation Australia chairman Stephen Lowy.

Later, the social media account of Australian goalkeeper Mat Ryan would show Sainsbury trying to open a few stubbies with his teeth. There was the 26-year-old's character laid bare: larrikin, joker, a throwback to the days of old – but also a bloody good footballer.

Two men have shaped Trent Sainsbury's life more than any other. The first is no surprise – the person he described as his inspiration to a national newspaper in 2013: "I just wanted to follow in his footsteps. In my eyes he was a great player and is a great dad, and if I can do anything to make him proud of me, then I will." Scott Sainsbury was not a professional footballer, with a career contained to local Perth club Armadale. But he enjoys a strong bond with his son, one different to the controlling and domineering type of soccer-dad relationships. Socceroo Bailey Wright explains of his team-mate: "His dad's always been someone pushing for his career. You can see the emotion and why he does what he does and part of why he's such a funny guy that he is. He loves a joke and a laugh, and he definitely gets that from his old man."



Tony Rallis has managed Sainsbury since 2010, when he left the Australian Institute of Sport and linked up with A-League side Central Coast Mariners. Rallis, who has guided the careers of several Socceroos, has built a strong bond with both his prized client and his family. He describes Scott as "salt of the earth".

"Both of Trent's parents are beautiful people," Rallis says. "They're real, there's nothing fake about them or contentious. They're just normal, down-to-earth human beings. The Sainsburys played a significant part in Trent's upbringing. That's a significant make-up of Trent's DNA."

The other figure in Sainsbury's life, who has helped guide him both on and off the field, is Graham Arnold. Eight years ago, Arnold was the one who took a punt on a skinny 18-year-old from Western

Australia. He signed Sainsbury, gave him his professional debut in 2010, and helped develop his skills. It was Arnold who turned him from a talented kid into one of Australia's best defenders. That relationship continues to this day and strengthened significantly last year when Sainsbury married Arnold's daughter Elissa. It went from coach to player, from mentor to protege, now to family.

Daniel McBreen was part of that famous Mariners team that won a premiership, a championship and reached two grand finals in a three-year-period, and also launched the careers of Sainsbury, Ryan, Mustafa Amini, Bernie Ibini-Isei, Oliver Bozanic and Anthony Caceres. McBreen says that to his players, and to Sainsbury in particular, Arnold was both confidant and coach all rolled into one.

“When you take to a young guy who’s moved away from home at the age of 15 and then going straight into that environment, he’s always going to be... I’m not going to say a father-figure and take anything away from his own father, but a secondary one who can advise him and look after him. I know his old man has massive respect for Arnie and vice versa. They talk a lot about

Trent and are there to guide someone he has had a massive effect on, not just Trent, but all those young guys there.”

Before Sainsbury landed on the Central Coast, he was a promising youngster who had represented his country at both the under-17 and under-20 level, and had gone through the AIS program. He had clear potential, but few knew just how far he could go.

The newly formed Melbourne Heart club offered Sainsbury a measly youth team contract of just \$5000, but he landed at the Mariners on a professional deal. The move

IT SEEMED LIKE HIS NATIONAL CAREER WAS OVER BEFORE IT HAD EVEN BEGUN ... SAINSBURY’S ATTITUDE – OR RATHER OSIECK’S PERCEPTION OF HIS LAID-BACK PERSONA – HAD COST HIM.

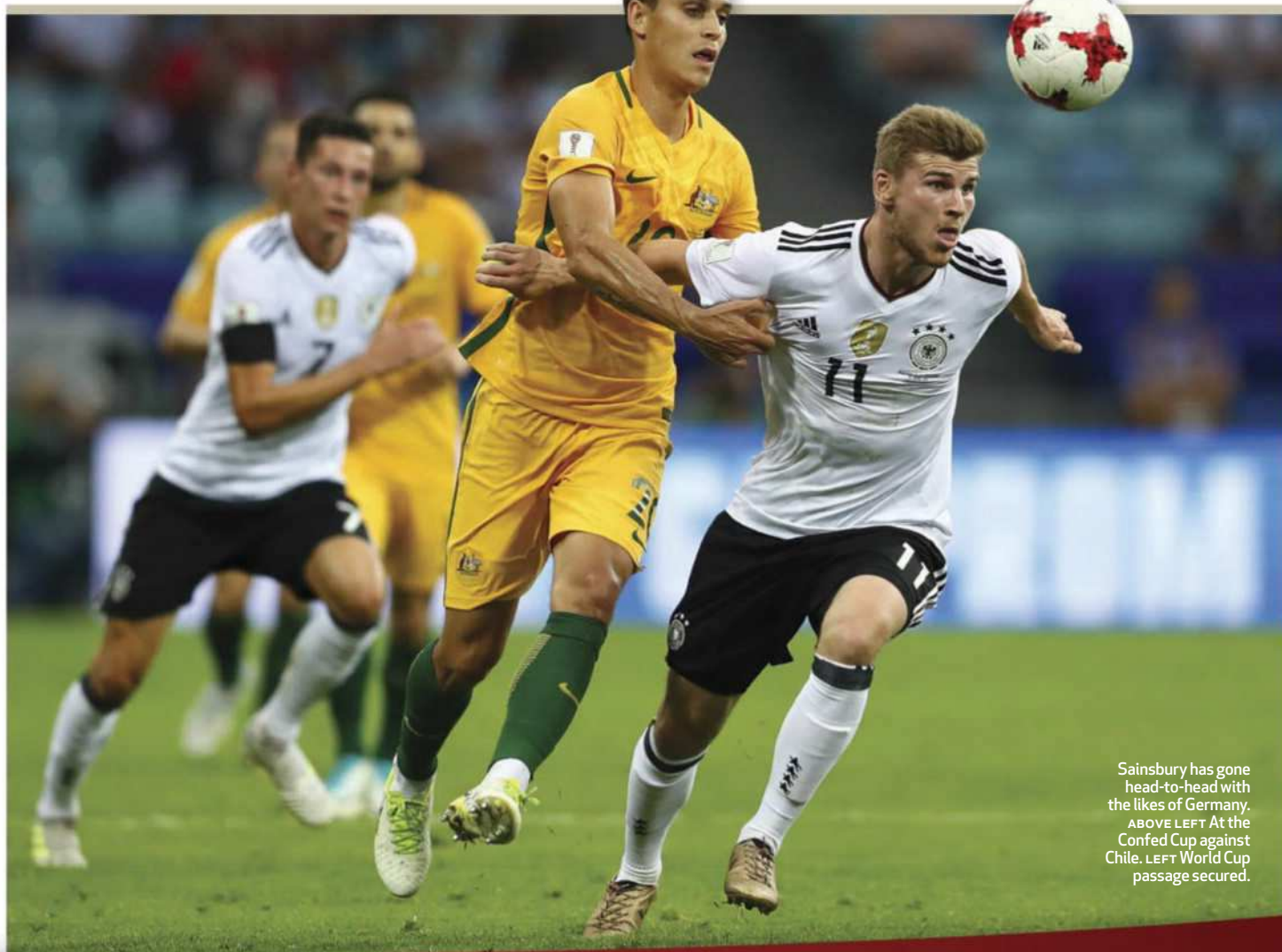
things,” McBreen says. “You couldn’t have two better professionals in his position teaching him all the facets of the game. When Trent finally got his opportunity in the first team, he had to play right back first and he didn’t like it. But he said if I have to get in the team that way, I’m happy to do it. And when he finally did get that centre back position, you knew straight away that no one was going to take it off him. I think with him and ‘Swanny’ as a centre back pairing, I think they’re up there as one of the best centre back

was the right one and he was accelerated into the first team quickly. He had to bide his time, often featuring at right back, with veteran central defenders Alex Wilkinson and Patrick Zwaanswijk ahead of him. But Gosford proved to be the perfect place to learn his craft. “They were two great players who in their own right had tremendous careers and done tremendous

pairings the A-League have ever seen.”

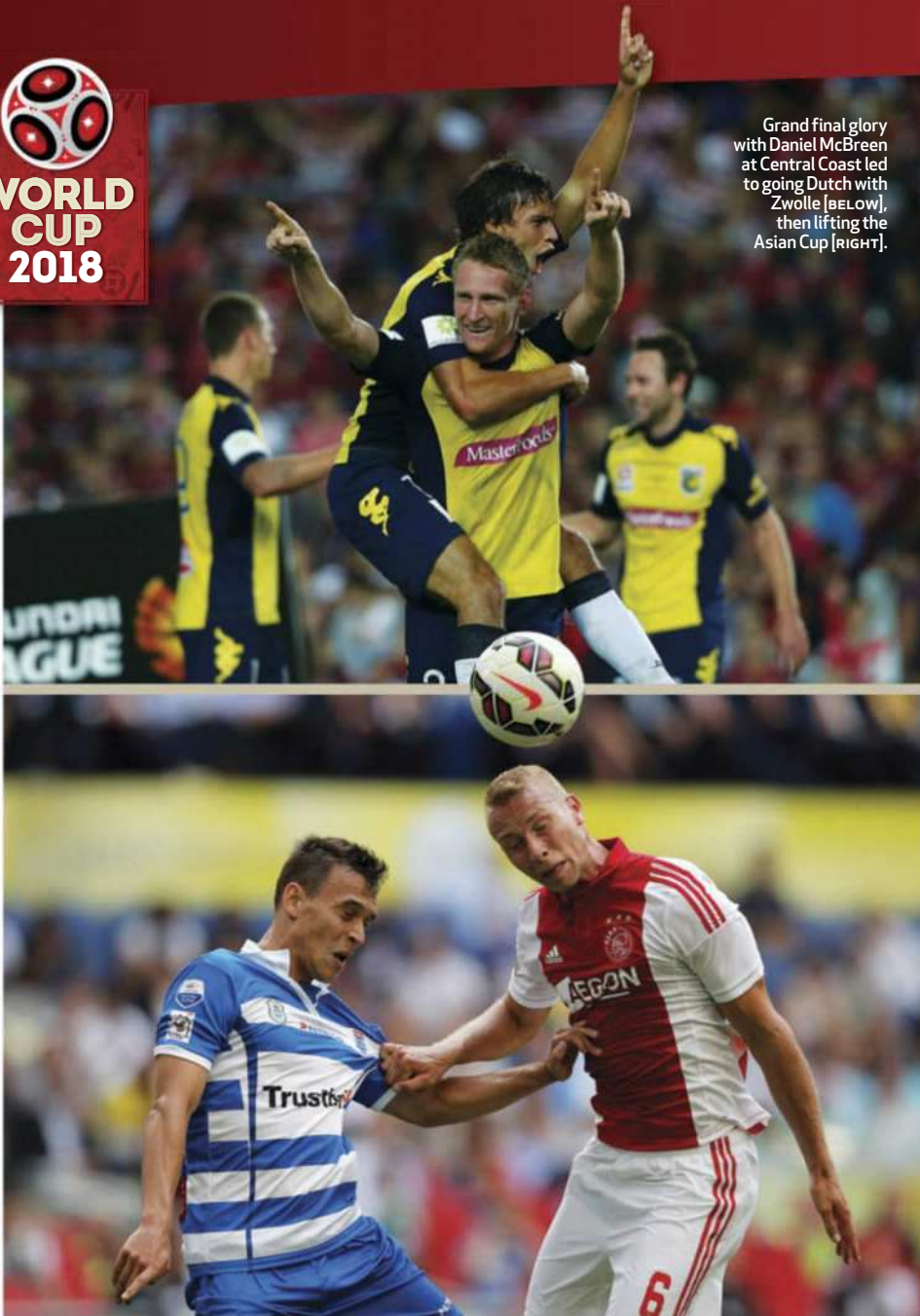
It was a fast rise for the surfer kid from WA. In three years, he established himself as one of the elite defenders in the A-League and was winning personal and team accolades. Sainsbury was named in the Professional Footballers Association’s team of the season in 2013 and was nominated for the NAB Young Footballer of the Year award. At 21, he was one of the sport’s hottest local prospects.

Socceroo coach Holger Osieck had noticed his stellar performances and he was called up in 2013 for a national team training camp. He was selected for the EAFF East Asian Cup, but was the only player on that experimental squad not to feature. It seemed like his national career was over before it had even begun. It was later revealed that Sainsbury’s attitude – or rather Osieck’s perception of his laid-back persona – had cost him. The defender was viewed as too “relaxed” and “lazy”, not the first time he has been misunderstood. A few months later, Osieck was sacked after a string of 6-0 defeats, just eight months before the 2014 World Cup in Brazil. In came Postecoglou, an appointment that would spell good news, not only for the Socceroos, but for Sainsbury. He was earmarked by the ▶



Sainsbury has gone head-to-head with the likes of Germany. ABOVE LEFT At the Confed Cup against Chile. LEFT World Cup passage secured.

Grand final glory with Daniel McBreen at Central Coast led to going Dutch with Zwolle [BELOW], then lifting the Asian Cup [RIGHT].



new coach to go to Brazil, but disaster struck after his move to Dutch club PEC Zwolle went through. On his debut for the Blauwvingers he suffered a freak injury after falling on a depressed sprinkler during the game, breaking his kneecap and putting him out of action for six months. His World Cup hopes evaporated in an instant.

The year ended better, with his first cap for the Socceroos coming in a 2-0 loss to Belgium. With the Asian Cup on home soil fast approaching, Postecoglou quickly made him a mainstay of his first XI. The decision paid off and then some – Sainsbury started every game as the Socceroos won their first-ever major trophy. With his first goal for his country, in the semi-final win over the United Arab Emirates, and a man of the match display in the 2-1 final win over South Korea, Sainsbury was selected in the team of the tournament. He had well and truly arrived as a Socceroo.

After two up-and-down seasons in Holland, marred by injury, Sainsbury made the surprise decision to head to China. The offer was a hugely lucrative one – a three-year-deal to Jiangsu Suning in a \$1.5 million transfer which the then 24-year-old couldn't pass up. He would later tell SBS: "The income side of the deal will allow me to help my family and people closest to me." Sainsbury was blasted by many fans – for selling out, for not chasing a move to a bigger European league like England or Spain, for taking the money. Australia's football fan base, filled with memories of Mark Viduka and Harry Kewell starring in the Premier League, wanted those days back. But the defender stuck to his guns.

McBreen, who also played in China, says it's a unique opportunity for a professional footballer. "I'm pretty sure he's been looking after his family in Perth," he says. "You might never have that opportunity again. You never know in football – you

could be injured and gone, you never know. It was good that he was headstrong to do what was best for himself and his family." Sainsbury has never lacked mental strength or toughness. A desire to play with Europe's elite remains. And that happened last year when he spent six months on loan with Italian giant Inter. While he only played one first-team game for the Milan club, he made history as the first Australian to do so, and got an insider's experience of how the best on the planet operate on a daily basis. He has now moved on loan to Switzerland with Zurich outfit Grasshoppers and is already making an impact. A move back to Italy, or Germany's Bundesliga, after the World Cup is likely if he can keep producing.

Talk to those who knew Trent Sainsbury, or "Sains", and they speak of his fun-loving side, his roguish charm, his likeability. Cocky but not arrogant. Confident but not over the top. You could argue he is more suited to the days of old, when professional sport was filled with characters and larrikins, and political correctness was not at its peak. But to some, this part of his personality disguises a sensitive soul who is incredibly driven and focused. An individual who his both determined and comfortable in his own skin.

"He's a brilliant player, everyone knows that," team-mate Wright says. "He's had his tough time with injuries throughout his career, but I think it's made him stronger mentally and physically. It still hasn't hindered him from becoming the player he is. Like anyone, he's as hungry and wants to play games and get himself to that highest level."

He may be the Socceroos' class clown, a typical dinky-di Aussie, but don't be fooled – the 26-year-old is intelligent and articulate. He is a strong believer in animal conservation and in protecting the environment. Sainsbury shuns most media interviews, and declined to speak to *Inside Sport* for this piece. He generally prefers to let his football do his talking, but he also is unafraid to share his views. Last June he caused a mini-media storm when spoke out about criticism aimed at the team, saying: "It would just be nice for the Australian public to be on our side for once". Sainsbury also revealed in November that he felt "let down" by Postecoglou's resignation.

He might enjoy a joke, but when it comes to football, he is deadly serious. That was completely evident in Australia's bid for a berth in the 2018 World Cup. Through the qualification phase, Sainsbury was one of the first names of the Socceroo team-sheet. And despite battling the debilitating groin condition osteitis pubis through 2017, which meant he only played six games of



SAINSBURY WAS THE GLUE THAT HELD POSTECOGLOU'S CONTROVERSIAL BACK-THREE DEFENCE INTACT ... HE EMERGED FROM THAT CAMPAIGN WITH A CEMENTED REPUTATION AS AUSTRALIA'S BEST DEFENDER.



Come Russia, the Socceroos could use some heroics from Sainsbury.

club football throughout the calendar year, he always put his hand up for his country for every qualifier.

Sainsbury was the glue that held Postecoglou's controversial back-three defence intact. He missed only one of Australia's 13 matches last year and was a star performer in the crucial final play-offs. His composure, his calmness under pressure and his ability to effortlessly bring the ball out of defence was priceless. He emerged from that campaign with a cemented reputation as Australia's best defender.

That image hasn't dimmed either, with the departure of Postecoglou and the short-term appointment of Bert van Marwijk. In the Dutchman's first game in charge, a friendly against lowly Norway in March, the Socceroos were thrashed 4-1. Without Sainsbury, which moved Mark Milligan to centre back and handed 22-year-old Aleksandar Susnjar a debut, the backline looked weak and disorganised. Van Marwijk even named-dropped Sainsbury's absence as a reason why the team was so poor. He has fast become the irreplaceable Socceroo.

With his father-in-law Arnold taking over the national team job after Russia, Sainsbury's influence could only grow. But first there is a World Cup to navigate, another group of death featuring France, Denmark and Peru to survive. Getting out of that would equal the historic feat of 2006. A fit and firing Sainsbury is vital to any chance of that happening. There is no adequate back-up, no like-for-like replacement. Forget the ageing Tim Cahill – the Perth product is indispensable. If the World Cup goes better than expected, Sainsbury's career could go to the next level. Then we will really find out just how good he is. ■

FOUR NAMES WE'LL LEARN IN RUSSIA

Every World Cup brings new football talents to the fore. Here's a quartet of breakout candidates for the Socceroos.

Aleksandar Susnjar

Largely unheard of before January, the 22-year-old defender has timed his run perfectly to break into the World Cup squad. After impressing with the Olyroos in China, Susnjar was called up for the March friendlies against Norway and Columbia. The centre back, who plies his trade in the Czech Republic, was one of the few to excel in Oslo and then kept his spot against the Colombians.

Josh Ridson

Australia has had a gaping hole at right back since Luke Wilkshire was omitted from the international scene. This has played into Ridson's hands – debuting for the Socceroos in 2015, the defender (below) has been a consistent performer in the A-League for many years. At 25 he may be the most reliable option on the right at the World Cup.



Andrew Nabbout

Nabbout's tale has seen him go from Melbourne Victory starlet to on the A-League scrapheap, resurrecting his career in the Malaysian second-division and A-League as a hero with Newcastle in just three years. Now starring for Urawa Red Diamonds in Japan, Nabbout gives the Socceroos attacking options up front and on the flanks.

Daniel Arzani

Uncapped Arzani is the one true bolter in Bert van Marwijk's side. The 19-year-old wunderkind burst on the A-League scene with Melbourne City this season. With silky skills, close control and the ability to change a game, the attacking midfielder with Iranian heritage has quickly become a hot commodity. There are few talents like Arzani in Australian football and he could become an impact player in Russia.

AN INSIDE SPORT PROMOTION

SPORTS FANS in Australia seeking world-class action can find it right on their doorstep in Singapore, as Asia's entertainment capital has fast become a global sporting hub. In July, three of the world's biggest football powers will return to the city's National Stadium, as the stars of Arsenal, Atlético de Madrid and Paris Saint-Germain come to play.

In its sixth instalment, the 2018 **International Champions Cup** takes on a new global format, featuring the largest number of clubs, matches and venues to date. This year's chase for the Cup features 18 of the world's best, playing 27 matches across the United States, Europe and Singapore. Where past tournaments recognised a winner within each participating continent, this year's competition presents a unified format, with one global champion to be crowned.

"The support we witnessed in Singapore at the International Champions Cup last year was phenomenal, and we are excited to return to the National Stadium as this year's only Asian stop in a revamped global tournament format," said Patrick Murphy, Chairman and President of Catalyst Media Group.

Paris Saint-Germain, France's most successful team with 36



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trophies to its name, will be making its first visit to Singapore. While Arsenal and Atlético de Madrid played in Singapore in 2015 and 2013 respectively, both clubs will relish meeting on neutral ground.

Kicking off on Thursday, July 26, Atlético de Madrid will play Arsenal in a highly anticipated meeting after the teams' hard-fought campaign in Europe this season. The two teams met in the semi-finals of the Europa League this season. Regardless of the results in Europe, fans will undoubtedly be captivated by the technique displayed by the two clubs when they meet here.

Arsenal, who will be led by its new manager after the departure of the legendary Arsene Wenger, will tackle Paris Saint-Germain on Saturday, July 28, in a rematch of their 2016-2017 UEFA Champions League group stage contest. Almost all four of the previous meetings between PSG and Arsenal have ended in draws except one in 1994, where the London team beat the French outfit by one goal.

The final match on Monday, July 30, will pit PSG against Atlético. Fans will, no doubt, be looking forward to this remarkably rare match-up – this will be only the second time the teams have played each other. Both have seen steady success in the past season and fans in Asia will savour the opportunity of watching the teams continue their amazing form at the National Stadium.

Legends from each of the participating clubs – Robert Pirès of Arsenal, José Luis Caminero of Atlético and Maxwell Scherrer of Paris Saint-Germain – are in Singapore to commemorate the launch of the tournament and to announce the fixtures.

Football is yet another of the world-class sporting gems that Singapore has to offer. Ten years ago, Singapore had the honour of hosting the first night-time event in Formula One history. The inaugural race proved a huge hit, staged on a new street circuit, with the city's famous skyline providing a truly spectacular backdrop. The **Formua 1 2018 Singapore Airlines Singapore Grand Prix** (September 14-16) is more than just a motor race – it is a night festival which presents many participation opportunities for everyone.

The crown jewel of the women's tennis circuit, the **BNP Paribas WTA Finals** (October 21-28), brings the culmination of the season to Singapore. It is the most prestigious tournament on the women's tour, featuring the top-eight singles and doubles players competing for prize money of US\$7 million. As well as the great tennis action, fans will have the opportunity to get up close and personal with their favourite tennis stars in the fan village.

The Singapore leg of the **HSBC Rugby Sevens** will once again bring the house down with an electrifying, non-stop atmosphere and with the whole world watching. The world's top rugby teams will be in town to showcase their dazzling speed and footwork. Spectators can expect music and entertainment, DJs and band performances, lighting and pyrotechnics during the tournament.



2018 International Champions Cup

Atletico de Madrid v Arsenal : Thursday July 26

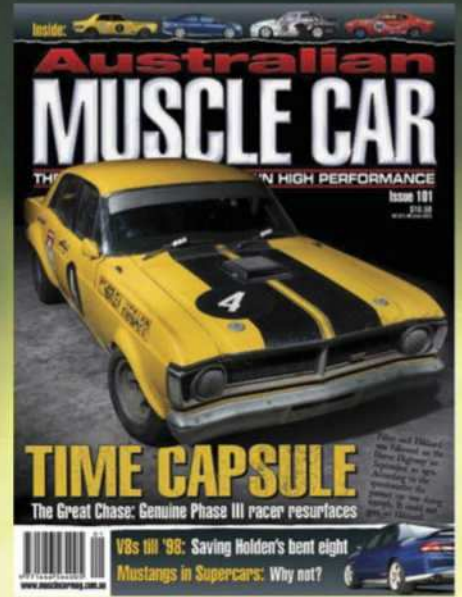
Arsenal v Paris Saint-Germain : Saturday July 28

Paris Saint-Germain v Atletico de Madrid : Monday July 30

Tickets at www.sportshub.com.sg/ICC2018



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insider

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MASTER THE BANDS

Get the hang of suspension training with TRX Master Trainer Marin Lazic.

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PHOTO BY Getty Images



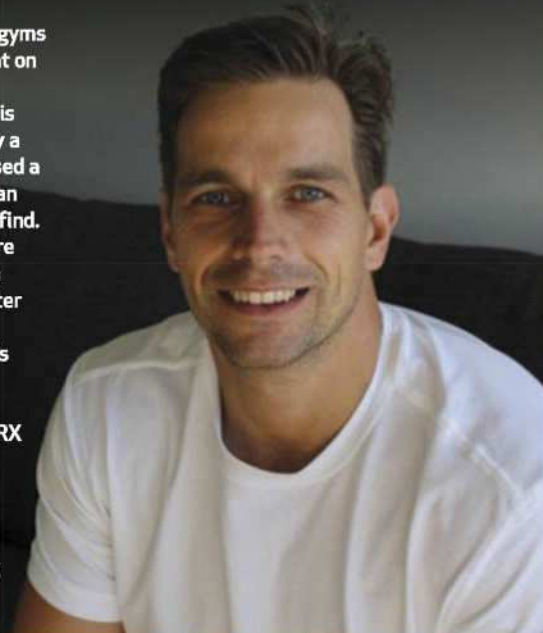
▲ Italian club Roma overcame a few obstacles on its surprisingly deep run in the UEFA Champions League this season. Credit a step-by-step approach, as veteran midfielder Daniele de Rossi exhibits during training.

MASTER THE BANDS

WITH TRX MASTER TRAINER MARIN LAZIC

Fast becoming a ubiquitous sight in gyms everywhere, TRX bands have caught on as a simple yet surprisingly deep system for working out. Their backstory is interesting, too: the gear was founded by a Navy SEAL, Randy Hetrick, who improvised a contraption while on deployment out of an old jiu-jitsu belt and other parts he could find. His fellow SEALs laughed at him, but were eventually won over by the device, which convinced Hetrick to start a company after his military tenure ended.

The functionality of TRX – which stands for total-body resistance exercise – was convincing for Marin Lazic, a national league water polo player. He became a TRX master trainer, one of three in Australia, and now runs the TRX Training Sydney facility in Rozelle. Lazic explains why suspension training is so effective, how to get started on the bands, and hanging out with Hetrick and the TRX brass.



Swiss balls and TRX. He was doing all these crazy, rotational-type movements which sort of looked like water polo, so I started playing with that. From there, I got introduced to TRX.

The first time I did a TRX chest press, I was just all over the place – I just couldn't do it. And it was just really weird how I could consider myself so strong, yet I couldn't do a body-weight suspension exercise. That made me really curious and I went down the whole changing the way how I train, the functional training way.

STRAP IN

It's definitely a tool that, as a personal trainer, it has made my life so much easier. In group training, I could have an NRL player alongside someone that's either just starting the fitness journey, or they might be carrying an injury. And the reason why is this tool is so versatile.

A lot of fitness tools in the industry, we're always trying to make things harder. You always try to make things more challenging, trying to impress people. With TRX, they can do all that sort of stuff. But you can also de-load your body weight – and one of the things that we really believe in, we want to teach you how to move well first before we load your body ... Let's actually clean up the dysfunction you have in your body, rather than build on the dysfunctions we already have. And then what happens is, if you keep loading the dysfunctions,

GETTING THE HANG

I was born in Serbia, where water polo is one of the main sports. I started as a swimmer, but as a young guy, got pretty bored following the black line. I was fortunate to play at two junior world championships for New Zealand and 253 national league games for Balmain Tigers.

Playing water polo, I did the whole traditional thing where, in the offseason, you go into the gym and you do your traditional movements, such as bench press, squats, deadlifts. And what I found was, every season or offseason, I was getting really strong in the gym, putting on size, I was hitting all the goals in the gym – and when it came to the season playing, nothing really changed.

It wasn't until ... I actually came across a YouTube video and watched an ice hockey player train using





"MOST OF OUR MUSCLES ARE DESIGNED TO ROTATE, YET WE TRAIN THEM VERTICALLY..."



it's going to probably end up resulting in a pretty big injury.

TRAIN WELL, BE WELL

If you and I were going to capture James Bond and torture him, we'd put him in a small room, put him under high stress, make him do something really physical, not let him sleep and all the rest of it. If you flip that around, it's kind of what everyone's doing at the gym – they go in the morning, they do a high-intensity workout, don't drink water. We need to get rid of the no-pain, no-gain attitude. Some people can handle that sort of stress, but the majority of us can't.

My experience of training elite athletes, like water polo or NRL guys is, it's always really the small things they need to work on that make the huge difference. We used to do bench press, everything was bench press; how much do you bench press? Now it's squat and deadlift. In five to ten years, we're still going to do some of those, but it's more movement-driven. It's more like: your body moves in three planes of motion; we play footy moving in three planes of motion. Yet in the gym, we train to be strong in one plane of motion. Then we kind of wonder why we have so many injuries. I think we need to kind of take it back and go: how does the body actually work? Why is it that 85 percent of our muscles are designed to rotate, yet we train it up and down vertically?

MADE PLANE

As I said, our body moves in three planes of motion: a sagittal plan, which is basically back and forwards; a frontal plane, which is side to side; and then the transverse, which is rotational.

From a functional anatomy point of view, 85 percent our muscles and connective tissues are designed to be in rotation. The reason for that is because it's the most efficient way to move to gravity. Now in terms of the science of the TRX, because of the single anchor point, you're getting the rotational forces through your body the whole time. If you think about hanging off the chin-up bar with both hands, the forces are going straight down. Remove one hand, you feel a rotational thing. That's the main difference between a TRX and something like Olympic rings, which is still a great tool. In our program, we train for movement



With TRX bands, the focus is on the movement, not the exercise.

rather than muscle. So traditionally, we used to say "I want to train my chest, my back, my biceps". Now, we think about the movements: I want to train a lunge, a squat, a vertical and horizontal push. But not only that: we think about how can this lunge be 3D? A lateral lunge, so you're moving the hip through three planes of motion.

SHIFT, DON'T LIFT

The concept that I think is still relatively new that we speak more about now is shifting the weight rather than lifting the weight. In any sport setting, a lot of the loads are usually coming from the side rather than straight up or down, or vertical. Yet again, in the gym you do things where the forces are coming vertical.

If you want an overall sort of strength, I think the thing to focus on in upper-body is doing push-pull. I'm a big believer in doing more pulling than pushing, because we are more forward-dominant creatures. I like to recommend a three-to-one pull-push ratio, just to balance out sitting in front of a computer, driving, all the rest.

In terms of lower-body, when you're walking, running, it's all single-leg stuff. Doing single-leg movements, when they're symmetrical movements, I think you get more bang for your buck. And that's what I recommend – minimal time invested to maximum results, you know? Single-leg squats, TRX lunges where your legs are suspended, I think they're amazing.

The beauty of TRX is even by doing a chest press, you're actually doing so much more, because you've got to balance. You've got to use your glutes, even though you're doing push-ups, because if you don't, you'll be all over the place. It does keep you honest. You have to keep your core engaged, because you'll have energy leaks and it will slow you down. Focus on the movement, not the exercise.

THE TRX WAY

I was very lucky to be involved with TRX and I sort of got a call one year to go to head office in San Francisco. That's where I sort of met Randy and all of the people at TRX headquarters and the main players in that office. Randy being a Navy SEAL, everything's kind of acronym, the whole company's built that Navy SEAL, army, systematised way ...

One thing Randy has done well is to bring in all the trainers to speak the same language. And you know, it makes sense – the whole idea was, if I'm describing a TRX exercise in San Francisco, you're gonna have the same experience (everywhere). One of the things that we do at TRX is go to different summits, where all the master trainers meet. We just go through what's new, what's the latest research and just upskill. This particular time, it was in Mykonos. Yeah, not a bad place to meet up with everyone. It was pretty cool.

– Jeff Centenera



↑ FEELING BLUE

It's been a decade since Canterbury last partnered up with New South Wales. And as expected, the iconic brand's 2018 Blues range doesn't disappoint. Their Classic jersey oozes retro style and is the perfect choice for any State of Origin situation – whether you're taking in that stadium atmosphere or enjoying the action at home or down at the local with friends and family. Available for both men and women. RRP \$119.95. Visit canterburynz.com.au to find out more.

↓ POWER AND CARDIO COMBO

Technogym, the world-leading producer of design and technology-driven fitness equipment, as well as an official supplier to the last six Olympic Games, is proud to announce the launch of SKILLRUN. The first treadmill to combine cardio and power training into a single solution, it's designed to meet the training requirements of both elite athletes and fitness enthusiasts. SKILLRUN sets a new benchmark in performance running, while answering the needs of all runners, from sprinters to marathon runners and triathletes. Thanks to unique MULTIDRIVE TECHNOLOGY (patent pending), the SKILLRUN offers both cardio training and resistance workouts to enhance power. Visit www.technogym.com/au for more info.



← BIG ADVENTURE

The long-awaited Vantage Endurance 3.0 Disc is now finally available! This elite endurance road bike is packed with features. With full-carbon forks, a smooth-welded alloy frame with endurance geometry, puncture-resistant continental tyres, disc brakes and Shimano Ultegra R8000, this bike is perfect for long-adventure rides or a fast commute through the city. RRP \$1599. Visit www.reidcycles.com.au to find out more.

➔ **EXCLUSIVE TO INTERSPORT**

In its fourth iteration, the Fresh Foam Zante v4 Running Shoe by New Balance continues to deliver a sleek silhouette and an ultra-lightweight and supportive ride. Designed with your ultimate finish line in mind, the Fresh Foam Zante v4 features engineered design elements built for high speeds, including a no-sew bootie-fit enhanced with HypoSkin, and New Balance's signature Fresh Foam midsole cushioning. Kilometre after kilometre, the Fresh Foam Zante v4 offers a superior fit and feel for runners seeking a swifter pace. RRP \$159.99. Available in Men's and Women's. Visit www.intersport.com.au to find out more.



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The compact and lightweight FUJIFILM X-T20 is complete with APS-C sized 24.3MP X-Trans™ CMOS III sensor and X-Processor Pro image-processing engine. The updated sensor and processor, along with a reworked AF algorithm, boost the camera's start-up time and AF performance, dramatically improving its ability to track moving subjects. Its tilting touchscreen LCD monitor enables users to shoot from a variety of angles with ease. The X-T20 also has enhanced video functionality and is capable of capturing 4K movies with Fujifilm's popular Film Simulation modes. Staying true to the X Series' functional design ethos, the X-T20 also combines an SLR-style viewfinder and dial-based operation. The FUJIFILM X-T20, providing quality on every shot, is available from leading photographic stores for RRP \$1799 for the body and XF18-55mm lens kit.



➔ **WINNING LOOK**

The Cleveland Cavaliers' 47 Super Rival Tee is perfect for the token sports fan looking for something to show their support, while also looking the part! The 100 percent soft-cotton jersey fabric gives this tee a high-quality look and feel. The vibrant front graphic provides an ideal balance between a supporter tee and a key everyday fashion piece. Featuring a tagless neckline, ribbed collar and side seams, this is a key addition for the fashionable active fan. RRP \$39.99. Visit www.47brand.com.au to find out more.



➔ **STICK IT TO 'EM**

Introducing the official and exclusive sticker collection of 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia. Produced by Panini, each of the 32 teams participating in the tournament is featured on its own double-page spread. The 2018 collection includes more than 650 stickers, including 50 foil stickers! This Panini product has proven a must-have World Cup collectible ever since the first edition way back in 1970. Available from all good newsagents.





THE LOWDOWN ON CARBS

Low-carb diets are back in a big way. When you see low-carb brekkie bowls on the menu at cafes, and hear elite athletes spruiking those ultra-low-carb ketogenic diets, you know it has gone mainstream. But do bread, pasta and potatoes really have to come off the menu?

The reality is carbs are found in a range of different foods, from bananas and legumes through to cakes and lollipops. While most of us would certainly benefit from cutting back on highly processed foods such as biscuits, burgers and pizza, eliminating fruit from your diet because it's "high in carbs" is throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

Carbohydrates are essential to life. They're the petrol that fuels the body's engine. Without carbs, you lose water, sodium and potassium, and your muscles lack the energy reserves you need in an emergency. In fact, glucose is the only source of energy on which your brain can draw.

There's no need to ditch all carbs to perform better, lose weight and be healthy – just choose better carbs. Whole grains, legumes and vegetables are slowly digested, which

makes them a big win for your health. Here's why your body will love good-quality, low-GI carbs:

High in fibre: foods that take longer to chew and digest help to keep you full for longer. Think fruit and vegies with their skin on, nuts, seeds, and wholegrain bread and pasta.

Long-lasting energy: the slow release of energy also prevents rapid spikes and slumps in blood sugar levels, giving you sustained energy. A bowl of muesli with oats, nuts and dried fruit with keep you going for longer than a bowl of corn flakes or a slice of white toast.

Stable blood glucose levels: blood glucose is more slowly released from your gut and trickled into your bloodstream, causing a lesser rise in insulin levels. If you have diabetes, low-GI carbs like legumes and whole grains are important to help maintain good blood sugar levels.

Brooke Longfield is Healthy Food Guide's Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) and Exercise Physiologist, BSc (Nutrition) (Hons), BAppSc (Ex&SpSc)



Recipes taken from *Healthy Food Guide* magazine (rrp \$5.60). June issue out now.



BEAN QUESADILLAS

Serves: 2
Time to make: 15 mins
Cost per serve: \$3.90

- olive-oil spray
- 1/2 teaspoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon chilli powder
- 1/2 onion, diced
- 1 garlic clove, crushed
- 1/2 large red capsicum, finely chopped
- 1/2 celery stalk, finely chopped
- 125g can sweet corn, rinsed, drained
- 220g can reduced-salt baked beans in tomato sauce
- 2 wholegrain wraps
- 1/3 cup grated reduced-fat cheese
- 1 cup baby rocket leaves
- 1 medium tomato, diced
- 1/2 ripe avocado, diced
- lime wedges, to serve

- 1 Spray a small non-stick frying pan with olive oil and set over medium heat. Add cumin, chilli powder, onion and garlic to pan with capsicum and celery; cook for three–four minutes, or until soft.
 - 2 Add sweet corn and baked beans to pan; cook for two–three more minutes, or until sauce thickens.
 - 3 Preheat a sandwich press. Spray outsides of wraps with olive oil. Place one wrap in sandwich press and spread with bean mixture; scatter with cheese and top with other wrap. Press sandwich-press lid gently and cook for another two–three minutes, or until cheese melts and wrap is warmed through. Transfer quesadilla to a plate.
 - 4 Cut quesadilla into quarters and place two quarters on each serving plate. Place rocket, tomato and avocado in a salad bowl; toss.
 - 5 Top quesadilla quarters with salad and serve with lime wedges.
- Tip:** To stop bean mixture from spilling in sandwich press, leave a 2cm border around wrap.

PER SERVE
1,694kJ/405cal
Protein: 20.4g
Total fat: 15g
Sat fat: 4.7g
Carbs: 41.3g
Sugars: 12g
Fibre: 13.1g
Sodium: 576mg
Calcium: 283mg
Iron: 2.7mg

- Good for diabetics
- High calcium
- High fibre
- High protein
- Low kJ
- Vegetarian



Protein, carbs or both?
Let your Accredited Practising Dietitian set the record straight.

BEEF STROGANOFF

Serves: **4**
Time to make: **30 mins**
Cost per serve: **\$4.30**

250g pappardelle or fettucine
500g beef stir-fry strips
1 brown onion, thinly sliced
1 cup mushrooms, thinly sliced
2 teaspoons paprika
100ml reduced-fat sour cream, plus extra, to serve
4 cups steamed broccolini or green beans, to serve

1 Cook pasta of choice according to packet instructions; drain well.
2 Meanwhile, heat one tablespoon olive oil in a large non-stick frying pan over medium-high heat. Add beef strips in batches and cook for one–two minutes per side, or until browned; transfer to a plate, cover to keep warm and set aside.
3 Add onion to pan and saute until soft. Add mushrooms and paprika; stir for three–four minutes, or until fragrant. Return reserved beef and any juices to pan with three–four tablespoons of water to thin sauce; stir well and bring to the boil.

Reduce heat to low, cover pan and simmer for five–six minutes, or until beef is tender and sauce is thick.

Remove pan from heat and stir through sour cream.

4 Combine beef stroganoff with pasta and divide among four bowls; top with an extra dollop of sour cream, season with black pepper and serve with steamed greens.

Tip: To make it gluten-free, use gluten-free pasta or use rice.

PER SERVE

1,898kJ/454cal
Protein: 42.9g
Total fat: 7.4g
Sat fat: 3.2g
Carbs: 49.1g
Sugars: 4g
Fibre: 6.6g
Sodium: 87mg
Calcium: 102mg
Iron: 4.2mg

- Good for diabetics
- High in fibre
- Low fat
- Low sodium
- High protein



LAMB STEAKS WITH SWEET POTATO MASH AND ROASTED TOMATOES

Serves: **4**
Time to make: **25 mins**
Cost per serve: **\$5.06**

250g punnet cherry tomatoes, halved
450g sweet potato, peeled, chopped
2 teaspoons olive oil
1 garlic clove, crushed
3 teaspoons lemon zest
400g can no-added-salt cannellini beans, rinsed, drained
2 cups baby spinach leaves
1 teaspoon sweet paprika
4 x 125g lean lamb leg steaks, fat trimmed
4 cups mixed salad leaves, to serve

1 Preheat oven to 160°C. Line a baking tray with baking paper. Place the tomatoes on prepared tray, and bake for ten minutes or until wilted. Set aside.

2 Meanwhile, boil sweet potato for ten minutes or until tender. Drain and set aside. Heat olive oil in the same saucepan over medium heat, add garlic and one teaspoon lemon zest and cook, stirring, for one minute, or until fragrant. Add drained beans and reserved sweet potato. Cook, stirring, until beans are heated through. Mash roughly. Stir through baby spinach leaves until just wilted. Keep warm.

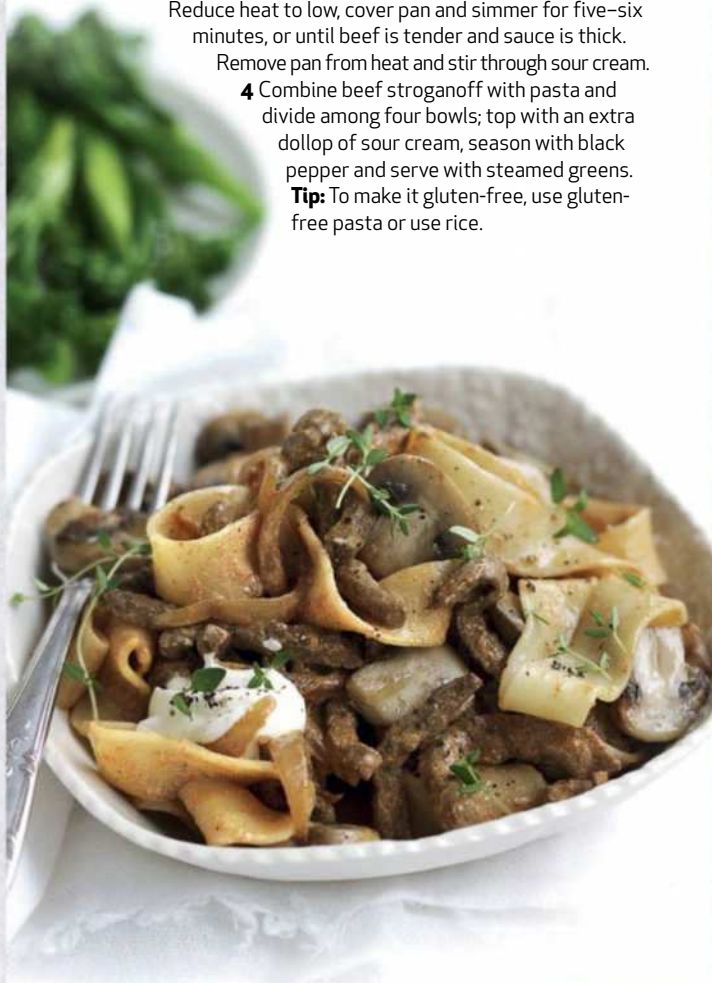
3 Combine the paprika and remaining lemon zest. Sprinkle paprika mixture evenly over lamb. Place a chargrill pan or non-stick frying pan over medium-high heat. Spray lamb lightly with oil; grill for two minutes each side, for medium, or until cooked to your liking. Transfer lamb to a plate, cover loosely with foil and set aside to rest for three minutes.

4 Slice lamb thickly. Serve lamb on the mash, topped with the roasted tomatoes and mixed salad leaves on the side.

PER SERVE

1,594kJ/381cal
Protein: 20.1g
Total fat: 8g
Sat fat: 19g
Carbs: 51g
Sugars: 3.7g
Fibre: 13.5g
Sodium: 212mg
Calcium: 147mg
Iron: 6.2mg

- No dairy
- Good for diabetics
- Gluten free
- High fibre
- High iron
- High protein
- Low fat
- Low kJ
- Low sodium



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QUICK READ

COLIN TATZ

A leading scholar of race politics (and former *Inside Sport* columnist), Colin Tatz, with son Paul, has updated his tribute to Aboriginal sports legends in *Black Pearls*. (This interview has been edited for length and clarity.)

This is the latest in a line of books that is the veritable Aboriginal Sports Hall of Fame. Can you tell us about this background?

My friend produced a book about sporting museums and he asked me to write a chapter. I wrote a chapter called "The hall, the wall and the page of fame", saying that a book could be a museum in the absence of having a physical building. This book, I've intended with its predecessors as well, to be a museum on paper.

This book is as much a history book as it is a sports book, because it's delineating all the eras in which Aborigines have achieved in sport in the most impossible or seemingly impossible of circumstances. They're either locked away in, you know, remote reserves, or they were banned from participating in sport or from meeting with any member of the non-Aboriginal community, or they were placed on islands that were in accessible, or they were removed children who were sent to institutions where they weren't allowed to play sport, but they still did.

As an academic, you wrote about sport, and treated it as a serious field of inquiry, long before it became fashionable to do so. How has that changed?

When I arrived in Canberra in 1961 to do my PhD at the ANU, I walked into the staff room and I said something about "Who's interested in sport?" And the head of the school, who was a man called Percy Partridge – he was a philosopher – took his glasses off and looked at me and said, "Anybody who is interested in sport ought to go find another place to study, but not here."

The other person in the room was the late Ian Turner. He was a very good historian of the

trade union movement. He went to Monash and I followed him soon after. Ian began writing an Aussie rules column for *The Australian* in 1964. I thought to myself, if Ian can start writing about sport in 1964 as an established academic, so can I.

I wrote about 30 essays for *The Australian* and they didn't publish a single one on the sports page. They put it in the literary columns over the weekend edition alongside Les Murray's poetry.

Why was it time for an update to the book?

We produced *Black Diamonds*, they printed 17,000 copies and every one of them was sold. *Black Diamonds* was A4 size, and what Aboriginal communities could do was just take a razor blade and cut out a picture, have it laminated and have their own exhibitions.

Then came *Black Gold* as a consolidation and an update in 2000. We revised it on paper in a journal in 2008 and now came the time ten years later to do this major update. So it's gone from an original 129 names to 276. One of the things that has happened is you could virtually say that Aboriginal participation and achievement has doubled in the last 20 years. Women in rugby league, AFL, soccer, that alone accounts for a lot of new members. I'd like you to look at chapter two, the singular sports. You wind up with [figure skater] Harley Windsor (pictured right) and Jesse Williams playing American football. This was unthinkable 20 years ago.

You make the point that Aboriginal achievement was long concentrated in boxing and the footy codes. In light of the 150th anniversary of the Aboriginal cricket tour of England (below), why did Aboriginal interest in the game, which was plainly significant in the late 19th century, recede?

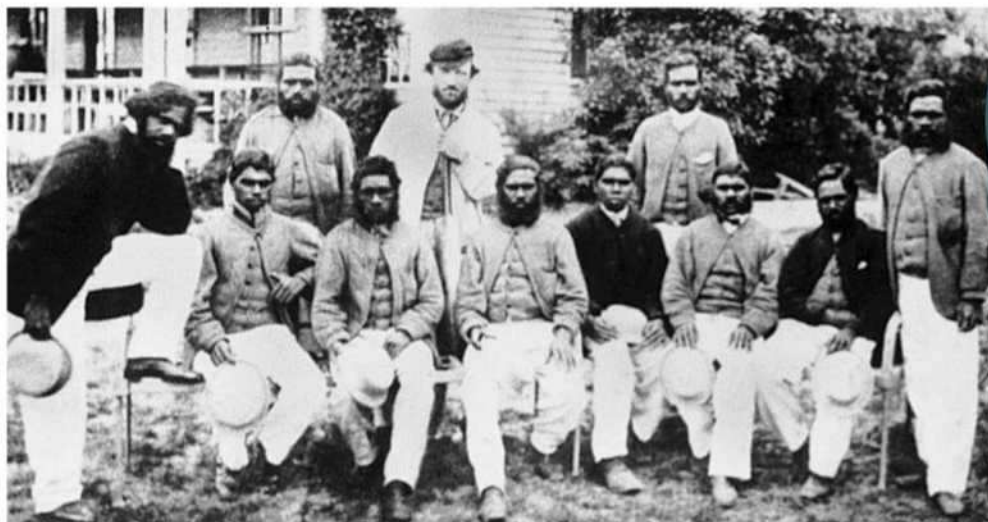
That chapter on cricket is fascinating. You have cricket at Coranderrk, which is now Healesville Zoo in Victoria, and they played a lot of cricket there in the 1870-80s. You had cricket in South

Australia, the mission called Poonindie, you had cricket at Purga mission near Ipswich, you had New Norcia – they used to walk 100km to Perth to play, and thousands of people flock to watch them play. They're actually called The Invincibles.

The crucial moment becomes 1897 in Queensland and 1905 in WA, when special protective legislation controlling Aborigines came into force. The officials hated the idea of Aborigines having social intercourse with white folks, and they killed it. The protector of Aborigines in Queensland actually made the statement that playing cricket gives them ideas about their station in life, which they can never truly achieve.

Your favourite story in the book?

There's a good story in the soccer chapter. There were four boys amongst many who were sent to a place called St Francis's Home in Adelaide, where the superintendent hated sport and wouldn't allow the boys to participate. That four of them managed to escape from that ... one was the great Charlie Perkins, who played for South Australia; John Moriarty, the first Aboriginal picked to play for Australia, although the match never took place; the third was Gordon Briscoe, who finished up getting a PhD in Aboriginal health; the fourth was Wally McArthur, who was a sprinter. He felt he was being discriminated against because of his colour – he went to England and became famous as a rugby league player. So you have this wonderful quartet of stolen children who were told not to play sport, but emerged as great figures.



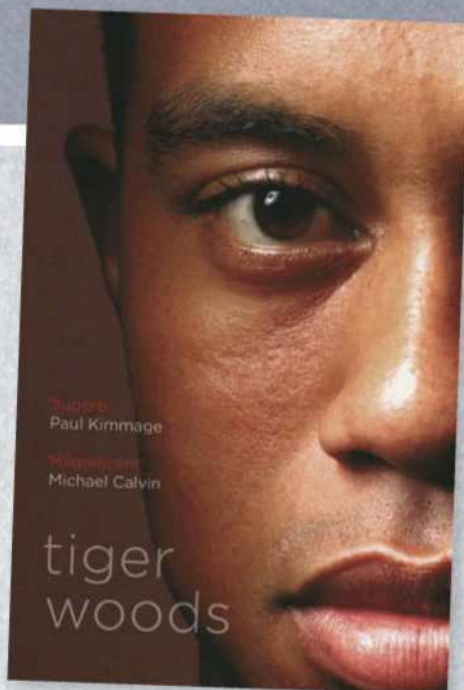
TIGER WOODS

BY JEFF BENEDICT AND ARMEN KETEVIAN
SIMON & SCHUSTER, \$35

In the middle of this extensive tome, there's an illuminating quote about Tiger Woods from former pal and noted truth-teller Charles Barkley: "He was so consumed with being the greatest golfer ever; he wasn't a very social guy ... When your whole life revolves around how you're doing on a golf course, you're going to develop a negative attitude to a certain degree."

Woods, of course, is the most extensively covered sportsman of his time, famously dating back to the trick-shot appearances on TV when he was two years old. But Benedict and Ketevian's book is among the first biographical treatments to attempt the whole tale of Tiger, an epic of modern fame, sporting greatness and filial psychodrama.

Funny as it is to recall, but Melbourne was the place that can hold onto a memory of a cleanskin Tiger, even as the *National Enquirer* was on the trail at Crown Towers that would lead to his undoing. Woods' mid-career detour into tabloid territory recast the narrative about him – he was a child star never allowed the time or space to



grow up, and with his father Earl's self-destructive macho tendencies shadowing him, it manifested in his sex-fuelled double life.

That thread fills a lot of pages in the book. But a parallel picture emerges over the course of Tiger's career – that of a decidedly bright and motivated

individual, but whose social awkwardness was a near-tragic flaw. There's a litany of Woods-treating-people-badly moments: ex-girlfriends, swing coaches, the media, inner-circle business associates, Bill Clinton, who he went out of his way to dis at least twice. Woods could be particularly cold about it all, especially if he felt it impeded his pursuit of dominating golf.

This implies a question: rather than the cautionary tale of a child star, is Tiger Woods' story really about the steep price of genius? That to get to his level of greatness requires such a narrowness of focus and a sacrifice of human feeling, few would countenance it? The book ends on the present moment, where we anticipate a potential, last shot at glory for a 42-year-old golfer – one that would be, after everything, well-received by sports fans. Because even as his old public image has become an artefact of the 2000s, Woods has finally become humanised. If he does win another major, it will be a different Tiger who does it, and that will be enough for people to cheer.

Good for: Golf followers and Woods fans will know most of the details. Lovers of biographies will get a lot out of this. **– Jeff Centenera**

BLACK PEARLS

THE ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER
SPORTS HALL OF FAME
BY COLIN TATZ AND PAUL TATZ,
ABORIGINAL STUDIES PRESS, \$35

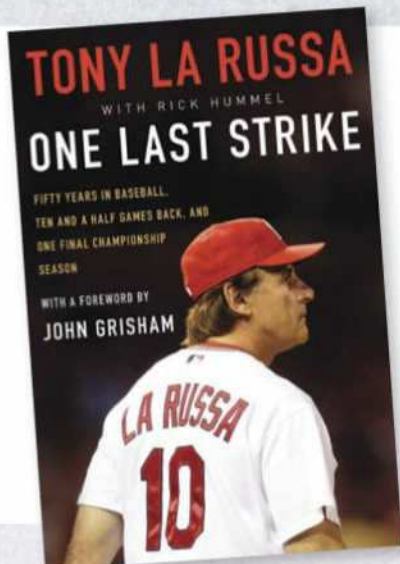
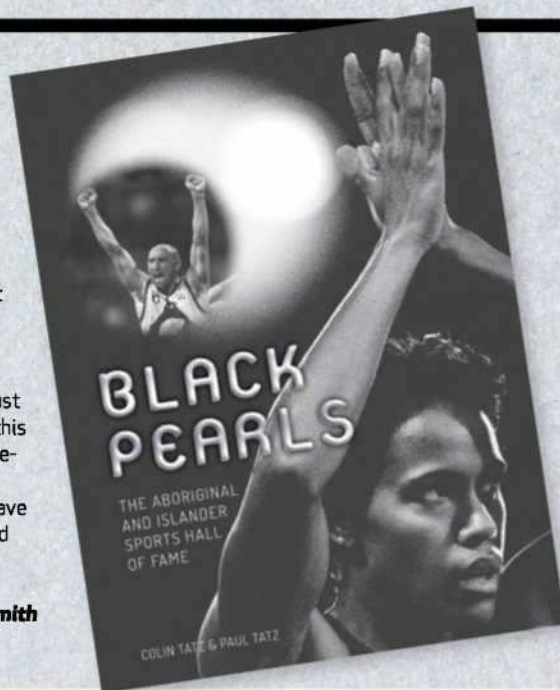
In the context of sport's supposed ability to be the great leveller across class and race, perhaps the most refreshing aspect of *Black Pearls* (see interview with co-author Colin Tatz opposite) is the fact it doesn't pull any punches about the lack of opportunity afforded aboriginal athletes since European occupation of Australia – in particular on the sporting front. One shining example is the rugby league star Frank Fisher. Nestled within a beautifully illustrated and documented rugby league chapter of this 387-page update, Frank "Big Shot" Fisher's listing is like a thump to the guts about how Australia got it so wrong in and around the turn of the 20th century.

As a controlled Aboriginal, Fisher had to apply to the Aboriginal administration for permission

to apply for a passport (he was told by a touring British player in the 1930s that he could make it in England if he travelled overseas). This request was refused – on the ground that one star from Cherbourg (that would be the fast-bowler Eddie Gilbert) was enough. An awful shame for Frank and for us: Fisher is spoken of in the highest regard by community folk throughout Queensland's north, who pass down stories of Fisher's size (playing weight of 95kg) and pure skill – he wowed 'em as a five-eighth, even till the ripe old age of 40. Anyway, he's just one of hundreds of legends you'll find inside this brilliantly researched and written coffee table-sized title.

Good for: Australian sports history fans brave enough to have their traditional beliefs tested about how we got to where we are today as a sporting nation.

– James Smith



BACK CATALOGUE ONE LAST STRIKE

BY TONY LA RUSSA, WITH RICK HUMMEL (2012)

Why do we follow sport, in this cynical, modern age of super-rich teams who predictably lead from start to finish on their way to another inevitable title? Because we all know, deep down, things don't always go to script; the tiniest chance of the unpredictable playing out is what keeps most of us hooked. And so it was seven seasons ago, when the St Louis Cardinals, nearing the end of an ordinary Major League Baseball season, dared to dream, despite the fact they were still ten wins behind the likely post-season qualifying teams with only 30 matches left to play.

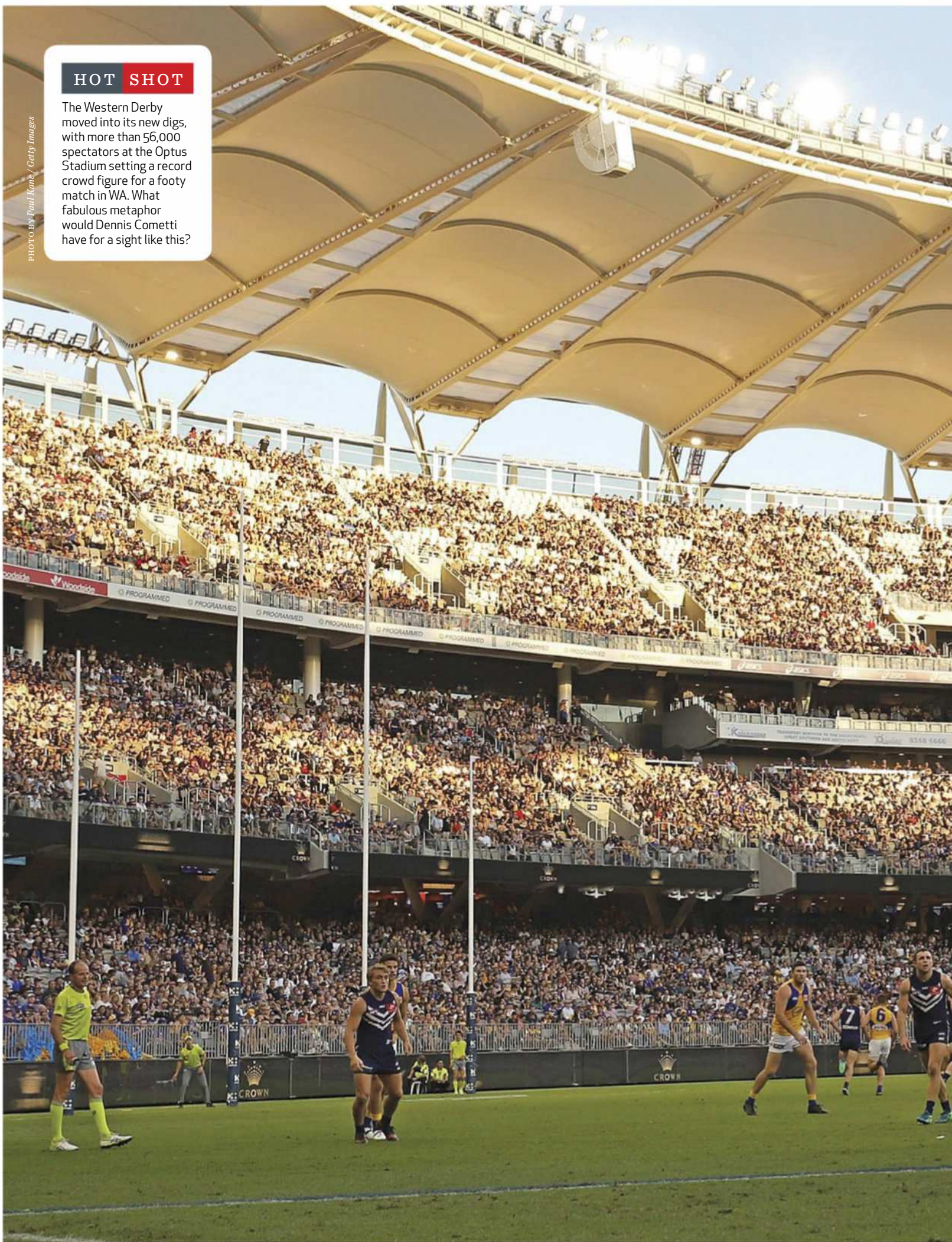
In *One Last Strike*, one of baseball's all-time great managers, Tony La Russa, takes the reader behind the curtain a year after one of sport's most amazing fightbacks. How thrilling did it all get, and why was a book produced about this particular fairy-tale finish? Well, spoiler alert: the Cards left it till the last game of the regular season to secure their play-off spot. Somehow they ended up going all the way to the World Series, which they won ... after being down to their last strike ... twice. Sometimes the story writes itself.

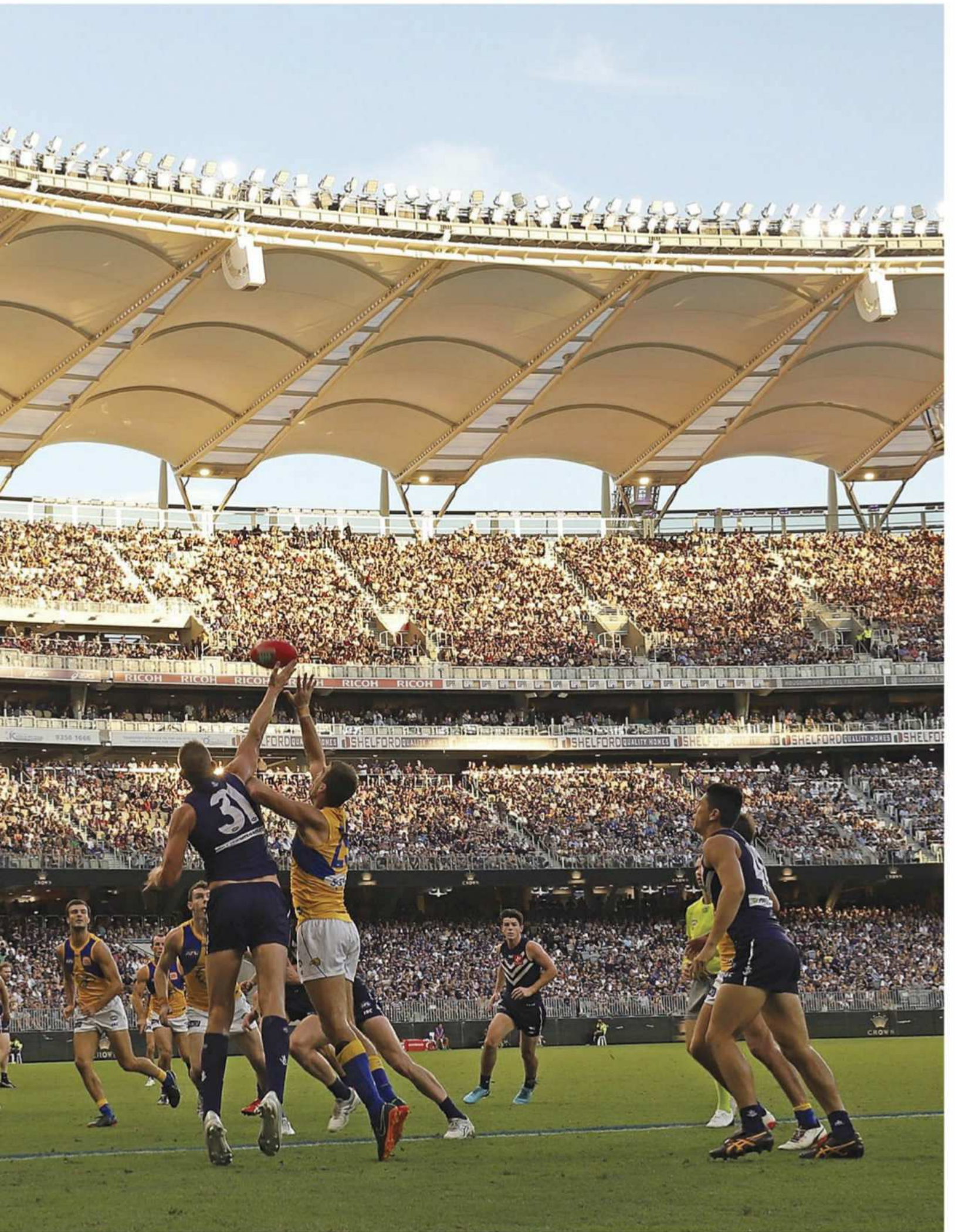
– JS

HOT SHOT

The Western Derby moved into its new digs, with more than 56,000 spectators at the Optus Stadium setting a record crowd figure for a footy match in WA. What fabulous metaphor would Dennis Cometti have for a sight like this?

PHOTO BY Paul Kane / Getty Images







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Justin Hodges

After helping Queensland to eight series wins over nine years from 2006-14, Justin Hodges had decided 2015 would be his last year of representative football. The tenacious and skilful centre had formed a key part of the Maroons' competitive core throughout his 26 Origin games. With the series level at 1-1, Hodges went into his last match as a Maroon desperate to retire a winner.

Coach Mal Meninga made sure Queensland was focused on winning a record ninth series win out of ten. But quietly, Hodges' team-mates – particularly those he'd played with for almost 15 years at the top level – were hell-bent on giving the 33-year-old victory in his last match.



"From all the week and all the meetings we had, it was never about me," says Justin Hodges. "But I just knew the boys were going to put in."

"I remember having a conversation with Greg [Inglis] during the week, saying, 'Mate, I can't walk out of this arena and lose, so make sure you win this for me.'"

Hodges was nervous leading into the game. It wasn't about the result, but more about knowing it would be the last time he'd be in Origin camp.

He recalls soaking in the loud atmosphere of close to 50,000 fans before walking out onto Suncorp Stadium. It's something that sticks with him to this day.

"When it was time to run out and the doors opened, it's like this breath of air comes through the tunnel," he said. "Before the doors open, you can't really hear anything and once [they do], you run out, the roar that you get – and the

goosebumps you get – is something you can't replace. It's an unbelievable feeling"

After the Blues kicked an early penalty goal, the Maroons hit back with three first-half tries to Dane Gagai, Josh Papalii and Greg Inglis. Hodges came up with a superlative play on his own before Papalii's score – batting the ball back when it was over the deadball line to get a repeat set.

It was a stunning effort that highlighted how much Queensland wanted it. "The game wasn't to be expected like that," Hodges says.

"We always thought it was going to be a close game. Then, we put a few points on pretty early. I think at half-time, we were in front by a fair bit."

Indeed, the Maroons raced to a 22-2 lead at the break. They continued to pour on the points afterwards in what became a blur of tries.

Players barely get time to breathe in Origin games. Not this one. The inflated scoreline allowed Hodges to relax and enjoy his final

moments as a Maroon.

"That game always sticks out for me as one of the greatest because I had time to reflect on everything," he said. "Normally in Origin, you don't get time to do anything, it's non-stop. Just the way that game panned out was unbelievable."

"That last 20 minutes, probably even the last 30 or 40 minutes, was the most pleasurable because I could actually just relax, knowing that the game's done, and soak up the atmosphere. We're just scoring try after try, everything just clicked for us, you know?"

Queensland captain Cameron Smith capped off the occasion by asking his old mate to hold up the trophy, too. It took Hodges by surprise and put the icing on a remarkable end to his Origin career:

"Just to do that – in front of our home crowd – was a great moment and one of the memories I'll always have."

– Andrew Marmont

"I could actually just relax, knowing that the game was done, and soak up the atmosphere."



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