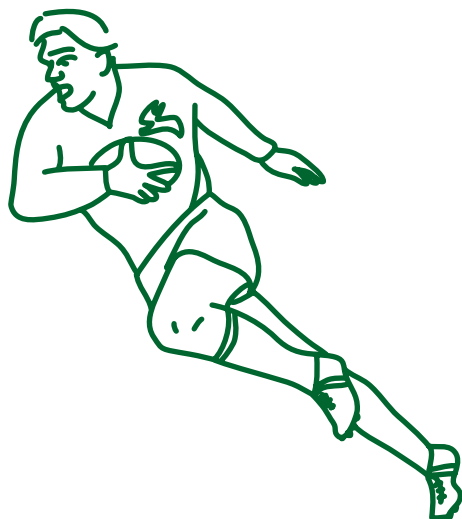


4TH ANNUAL LECTURE

TOM BROCK LECTURE

SOUTH SYDNEY LEAGUES CLUB, 22 August 2002

The Changing Face of Rugby League



Mr Alan Clarkson OAM
Sydney

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TOM BROCK BEQUEST

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

Objectives:

1. To maintain the Tom Brock Collection.
2. To organise an annual scholarly lecture on the history of Australian rugby league.
3. To award an annual Tom Brock Scholarship to the value of \$5,000.
4. To undertake any other activities which may advance the serious study of rugby league.
5. To publicise the above activities.

Activities:

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

Illustrations:

Courtesy of Ian Heads

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

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

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

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

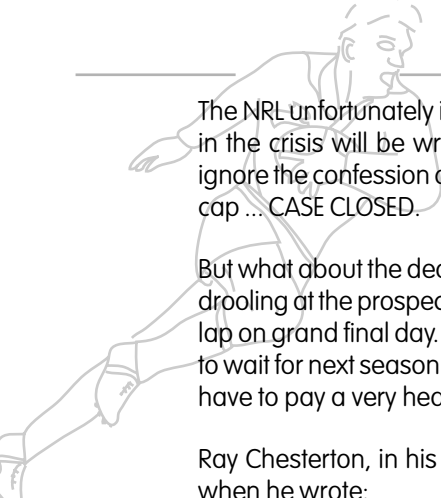
Rugby league has faced, and survived countless dramas over its history and I have no doubt the Canterbury Bulldog cheating, which exploded on the league scene, will rank up there with some of the biggest scandals in our time.

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

What my good friend, Ian Heads suffered in the lead up to that magnificent rally in October 2001 was appalling.



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

He had written a story for the *Sunday Telegraph* about the fight for life by Souths and their march through the Sydney streets on that Sunday but the story was spiked probably because it did not fit into News Limited thoughts.

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

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

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

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

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

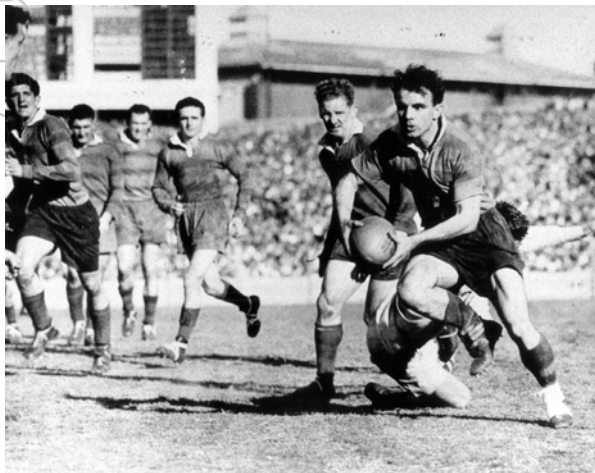
When he came down to join Souths I was at his first match and when he came out on the field after halftime, I bellowed 'Good on you Tigger' which was his nickname at school and he knew there was a Novocastrian there to support him.

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

The tackling skill was learned at school from Brother Lucian, the football coach who drove home to his players the need to tackle low in what he termed 'daisy cutters' and this lesson was something Clive carried through his superb career with one famous exception.



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



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

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

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

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

My journalistic career began with an organisation called Australian United Press which was a press agency supplying news to country papers. It was a marvellous training area because in one working day, for example a Monday, I could be covering an industrial court case, re-writing some of the stories from the afternoon papers, reporting on the fight at Sydney Stadium that evening and then calling into the NSW Rugby League on the way back to the office to pick up what happened at the meeting.

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

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

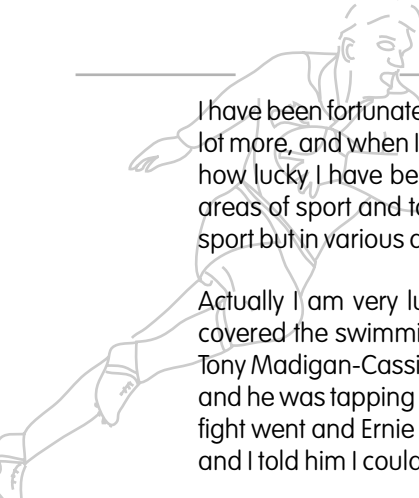
The following year I was one of the sporting scribes at the Melbourne Olympics and our staff was about 25 which included copytakers and car drivers. For the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, the Fairfax organisation had hundreds running round, but I suppose that comes under the category of progress.

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

It is not everyone who can regard, as a days work, covering a rugby league grand final, or a Davis Cup match or a rugby league Test match in England on a Kangaroo tour, or perhaps the final of the Olympic 1500 metres event in Rome in 1960 or Dawn Fraser winning her third successive 100 metres freestyle gold medal in Tokyo in 1964 or that great lady, Betty Cuthbert winning the 400 metres running event in Tokyo.



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the years I was Tom's assistant and for years after, I never heard one disparaging remark about him, or his work. To borrow a rugby league slogan ... he was simply the best and the league acknowledged this when they made him a life member.

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

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

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

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

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

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

In 1967 the team was stationed at a magnificent village, Ilkley Moor, but realistically it was not the venue for 28 footballers and half a dozen media



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

people for six weeks. To put it politely as I can, the hotel was appalling. After the first couple of days two of the toilets did not work and there was a rush to get back from training because only the first dozen or so could have the luxury of a hot bath ... and then that was it for the hot water.

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was an incredible tour but it looked doomed when we lost the first Test 16-11 and in the process two of our great players, Reg Gasnier and Johnny

GREAT BRITAIN

Colours : White Jerseys with Red and Blue 'V'

1. A. KEEGAN (Hull)
Full Back
2. C. YOUNG (Hull Kingston Rovers)
Right Wing
3. I. BROOKE (Wakefield Trinity)
Right Centre
4. M. PRICE (Rochdale Hornets)
Left Centre
5. W. BURGESS (Barrow)
Left Wing
6. R. MILLWARD (Hull Kingston Rovers)
Out-half
7. T. BISHOP (St. Helens)
Scrum-half
8. W. HOLLIDAY (Hull Kingston Rovers)
Hooker
9. P. FLANAGAN (Hull Kingston Rovers)
Hooker
10. C. WATSON (St. Helens)
Front-row Forward
11. J. MANTLE (St. Helens)
Second-row Forward
12. R. IRVING (Oldham)
Second-row Forward
13. D. ROBINSON (Swinton)
Loose Forward
14. G. JORDAN (Featherstone Rovers)
Substitute
15. G. REES (Swinton)

The Teams

AUSTRALIA

Colours : Dark Green Jerseys with Yellow 'V'

2. L. H. JOHNS
Full Back
8. J. N. McDONALD
Right Wing
1. G. F. LANGLANDS
Right Centre
7. R. W. GASNIER
Left Centre
4. J. C. KING
Left Wing
11. J. W. GLEESON
Out-half
13. W. J. SMITH
Scrum-half
23. D. P. MANTEIT
Front-row Forward
22. N. R. KELLY
Hooker
21. P. M. GALLAGHER
Front-row Forward
17. R. J. LYNCH
Second-row Forward
19. E. W. RASMUSSEN
Second-row Forward
15. J. W. RAPER
Loose Forward
12. A. R. BRANSON
Substitute
26. E. A. WALTERS

Referee: G. F. LINDOP (Wakefield)

Touch Judges: H. BRADSHAW (Sheffield), B. HALL (Wakefield)

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

Castleford Rugby League Football Club Ltd.
Wheldon Road, Castleford



CASTLEFORD v AUSTRALIA

Wednesday, 8th November, 1967 Kick-off 7.30 p.m.

OFFICIAL PROGRAMME - 6d.

Castleford versus Australia 1967.

Raper were badly injured and ruled out of the second Test at London's White City.

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

In his first Test match, Ron Coote had a superb match, saving what seemed a certain try with a glorious covering tackle of Ian Brooke and then wrapping up the Test with a try just two minutes from the end for a dramatic 17-11 win to level the series.

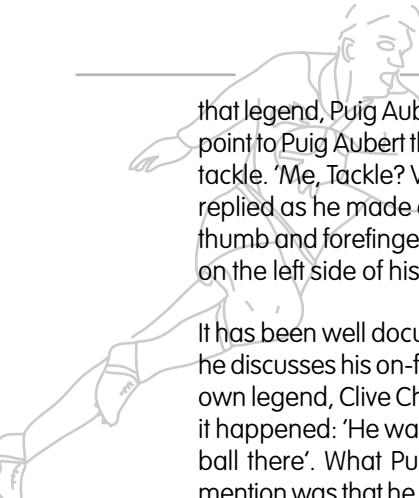
Johnny Raper was back for the Third Test which Australia won 11-3 and before the match I walked across the Swinton ground with him. Chook was grinning because in the blizzard conditions there was ice on the ground.

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

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

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

On that tour there were so many unforgettable moments but one of the highlights came when we were in France and Mike Gibson and I spoke to



that legend, Puig Aubert. Mike made the point to Puig Aubert that he did not like to tackle. 'Me, Tackle? Very small heart' he replied as he made a tiny circle with his thumb and forefinger and then placed it on the left side of his chest.

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

was this fellow was the trumpeter for the band and the damage he received stopped him working for a time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

That old phrase like chalk and cheese certainly applies to rugby league the way it was and the way it is these days ... today there are so many full time professionals, the pressure on the coaches and referees is intense ... there is a very real worry about the state of the game in the country districts and the judiciary system leaves we outsiders wondering just what the heck it's all about.

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

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

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

One of the big changes in the game these days to when I was involved is that so many players these days are full-time professionals and there should

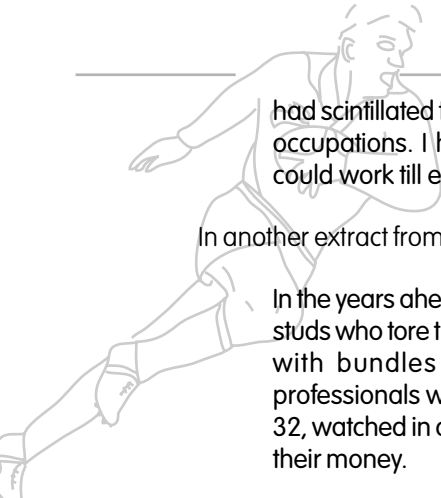


Looking a bit more relaxed as a player than he is in these days, Ricky Stuart organises a Raiders attack.

be concern about their future after their football careers are over. Do these young men have any sort of employment they can fall back on when the time comes to retire from the game? Certainly the top money earners would probably be OK but the huge army of players in the middle order are the worry.

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

One afternoon after I left a meeting with these eight men, it suddenly occurred to me that these superlative men had been forced to retire from their athletic careers at an age when I, in my profession, had yet to write word one. Their public lives had ended before mine began. In their mid-thirties these gifted men had reached the climax of their fame, they



had scintillated for a decade then been required to find other occupations. I had only stumbled into a career at which I could work till eighty ... if I lived that long.

In another extract from his book, Michener wrote:

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

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

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

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

As Noel Cleal put it:

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

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

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

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

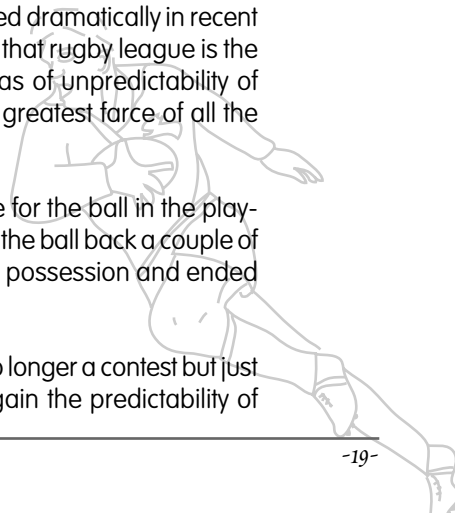
In the 1988 and 1989 seasons, nine quality players came into the Riverina district as captain-coaches and the game flourished. But these days it would be impossible to get players of that calibre because they all talk in telephone numbers. The simple fact is that the money being handed out to players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

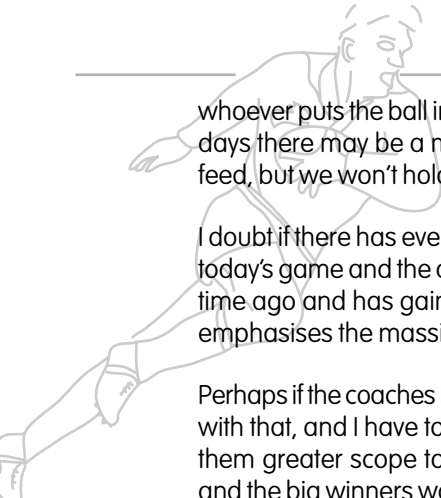
We all know how vital country football has been to the health and welfare of the code, especially here in Sydney. You simply have to look at the list of internationals to see where many of them started their playing careers to realise that something has to be done, and done very quickly.

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

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

And what about the scrums these days, they are no longer a contest but just a little get together of opposition players and again the predictability of





whoever puts the ball in gets possession, but you never know, one of these days there may be a minor miracle and a scrum will be won against the feed, but we won't hold out breath waiting for that unlikely event.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MR ALAN CLARKSON OAM

Mr Alan Clarkson was the chief writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Sun Herald* from 1967 to 1989, having worked on both papers from 1954 when he had the privilege of being the second string league writer to the great Tom Goodman. Alan Clarkson covered five Kangaroo tours and a tour of New Zealand in 1969 and the World Cup in England in 1970. He also reported on three Olympic Games, including the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games and covered other sports such as tennis and swimming. He was awarded an OAM in 1990 for services to sport in journalism.

PREVIOUS TOM BROCK LECTURES

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| 1999 | Dr Andrew Moore, 'Jimmy Devereux's Yorkshire Pudding: Reflections on the Origins of Rugby League in New South Wales and Queensland' |
| 2000 | Mr Ian Heads, 'Gang-Gans at One O'clock ... and other Flights of Fancy: A Personal Journey through Rugby League' |
| 2001 | Mr Alex Buzo, 'Sydney: Heart of Rugby League' |