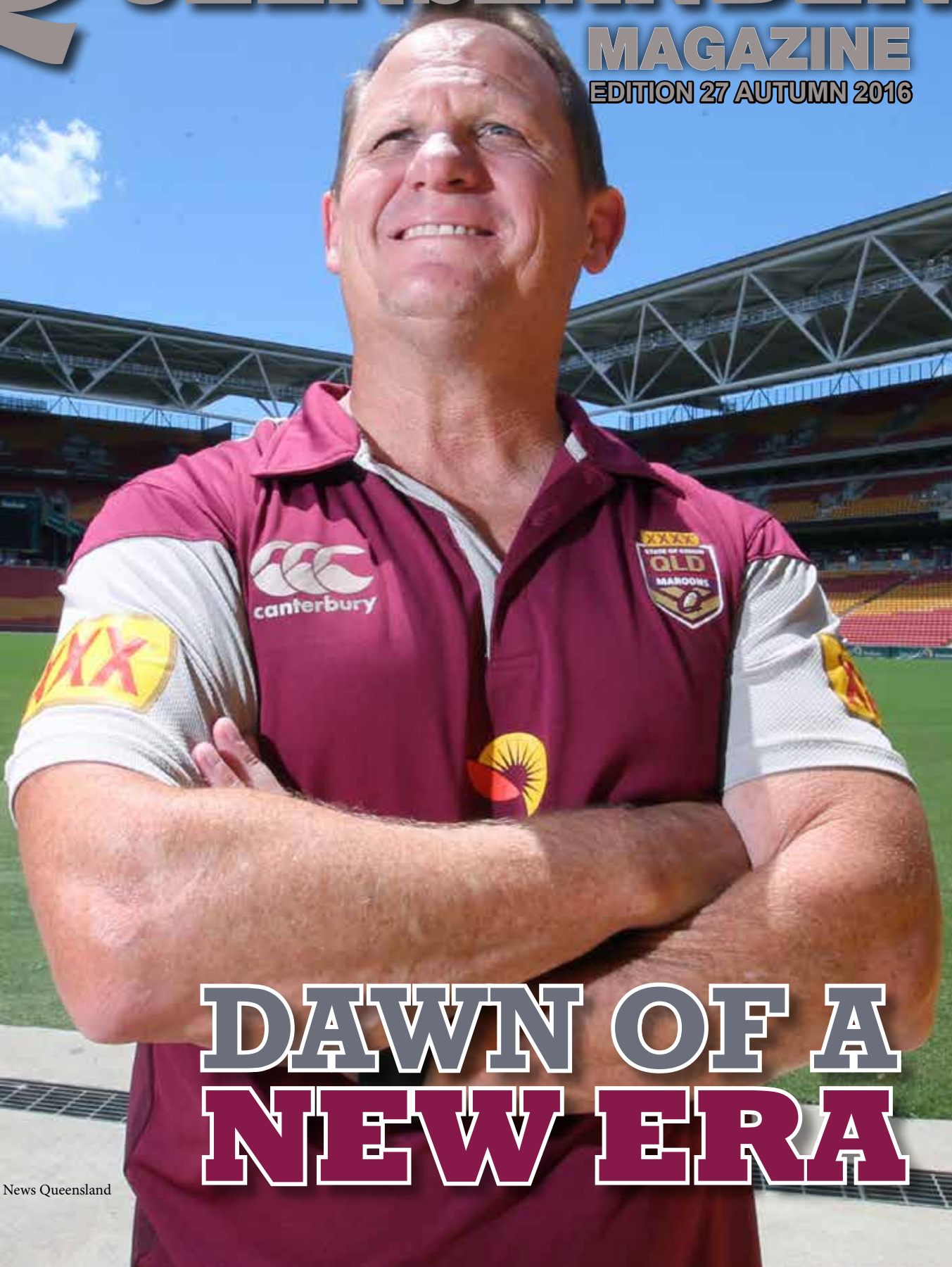


Official Magazine of Queensland's Former Origin Greats

**FOGS**  
**QUEENSLAND**  
FORMER ORIGIN GREATS

# QUEENSLANDER

**MAGAZINE**  
EDITION 27 AUTUMN 2016



# DAWN OF A NEW ERA



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# A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN

**THE** changing of an era is always a time of great challenge, and that is what lies ahead of us at the Former Origin Greats and in rugby league itself this year.

In many ways, this year is a very exciting time for the FOGS.

But at the same time, we have gone into 2016 carrying heavy hearts with the loss of two of our great friends in Des Hancock and John Crane.

Both men were well-known and well-liked by everyone at FOGS and in the wider league community for their passion and long service to the game.

We pay tribute to both men in this edition of the Queenslander Magazine, and the legacy these great men left behind. We will miss them enormously.

Craney, who worked alongside us here at FOGS for many years, was instrumental in setting up some of the programs and relationships we share today, like the ARTIE Academy. With the FOGS Employment Expos now finished, all of our attention

is focused on the ARTIE Academy, and we have had an exciting development with a new collaboration with the Brisbane Broncos, working together on Indigenous education.

We have joined forces, working together to cover more schools and reach more kids.

It is a relationship that is working well, and one that I am sure would please Craney no end.

It is disappointing that we have been unable to continue our program in Townsville, but a condition on our funding from the Federal Government dictates that we have to be using those funds in South Queensland.

We are doing everything possible to see how we can get back into Townsville to continue the great results that the ARTIE Academy was achieving up there.

Of course, as we head into Origin time again, we all know that the Queensland team is undergoing its own changing of eras at the

moment, with Kevin Walters replacing Mal Meninga as coach after 10 years.

This year's series has not even started yet, and already Kevvie has been called on to make a number of tough decisions.

First, he took the Queensland job knowing that it would cost him his job at the Broncos. But he did it. He then had to make some tough calls on Queensland's coaching staff to help bring in the Maroons' new era. But he did it.

Then there was the drama over the Emerging Origin camp, where Kevvie banned certain players for failing to follow team orders.

Each one of these decisions would have taken an enormous personal toll on Kevvie. But his decisions were based on what was best for Queensland, not what would make his life easier as a coach.

I hope all Queensland players, involved in that night or not, now understand the importance of maintaining Queensland's integrity by the example Kevvie has set.

A State of Origin debut is always a baptism of fire. Kevvie experienced this as a player, and now he has experienced it again as a coach. Once again he has shown he is the right man for the job.

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**GENE MILES**  
**EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN**

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# FROM THE COACH'S DESK

With Queensland Coach Kevin Walters



**TAKING** over as Queensland's State of Origin coach is one of the most daunting and exciting experiences of my career.

I am a person who has always set the bar pretty high for myself, and once my playing days were finished, I envisaged challenging myself further in our great game by becoming an NRL coach, and eventually a coach at representative level.

I feel very proud and privileged to hold the position of Queensland coach.

I just want to make sure that I do the position justice in everything that we do, and continue the good work that has been done in years gone by.

Many people have remarked about how difficult the position may be following on from the tremendous job Mal Meninga did during his 10 years as coach, and the incredible success Queensland enjoyed under his guidance.

I don't see that success as any sort of negative at all. As a Queenslander first and foremost, I am exceptionally proud of what the Maroons have achieved since 2006, and very humbled to have contributed to that success.

But the way I see it, Origin is like a relay race. The job is not done. Mal has simply passed on the baton to me as coach, and it is my responsibility now to do my part by taking on the next leg of the journey. I am very fortunate in that Mal has left behind a very good set-up with the system that he created.

There are not a lot of major changes needed, but it is just about making sure things are organised so we are ready to get the job done.

Part of that means that I want to put my own stamp on things. When Mal came in, he changed the way a few things operated, and that was the Mal Meninga way.

For myself coming into the role, I want to be careful that I don't want to do something because that is what Mal thought was right, or what Wayne Bennett felt was right.

The decisions I make are going to be my decisions, and what I think is right.

At the end of the day, the team and the results are my responsibility. I have to make sure that the decisions I make are my own. Being Queensland coach is an all-consuming job, but I wouldn't have it any other way.

The dramas we had at the start of the year with players breaking curfew in the Emerging Origin camp were a good reminder to everyone about how seriously Queenslanders take Origin, and what the Maroon jersey means to the people of our great state.

When the boys decided to venture out, I think it was a spur of the moment decision. Unfortunately, it has ended up having some pretty big consequences for them.

But I felt it was important that the standards and expectations we expect from players who aspire to wear the Queensland jersey were reinforced and maintained.

I was very pleased that our senior players, led by Cameron Smith and Johnathan Thurston, publicly backed the stance taken against those players who had misbehaved in camp.

They are very proud of what the Queensland jersey means to them, and they want to protect that. The message from our senior players was clear: If you want to play for Queensland, then Queensland comes first in everything we do.

Moving forward, I am very excited about what lies ahead of us in this year's Origin series.

We will have a number of new faces in camp this year to freshen up our preparation, but I am not looking to re-invent the wheel as coach. One look at the scoreboard from the past 10 years makes it obvious that Queensland has a winning formula and a winning culture.

My job is to add my pieces to the big-picture jigsaw, and make sure Queensland remains successful for many years to come.

Thank you all for your support, and look forward to having all Queenslanders behind us for the next part of the journey.



Pictures: Courtesy News Queensland



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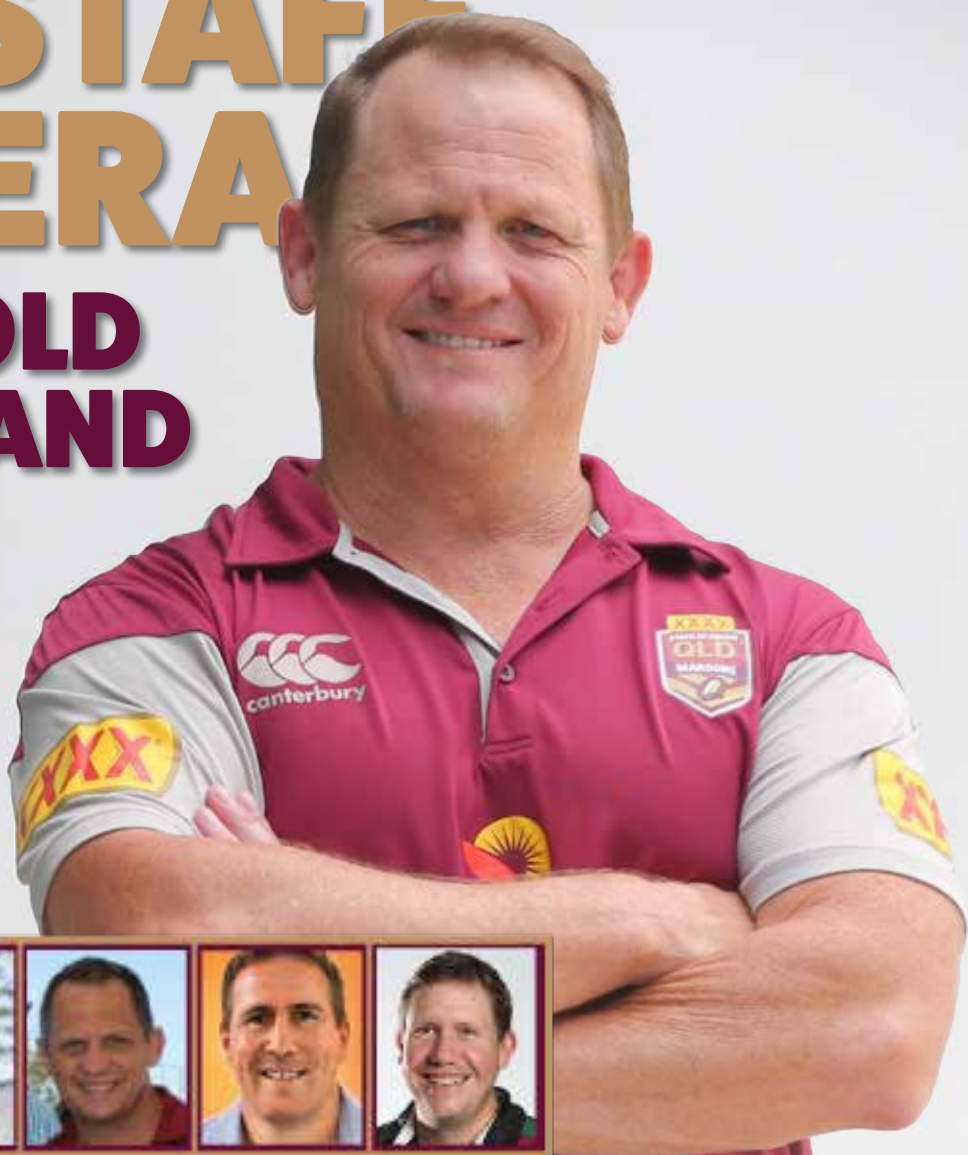
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# NEW STAFF NEW ERA

## .....SAME OLD QUEENSLAND SPIRIT



Top Row (Left to Right): Anthony Siebold, Trevor Gilmeister, Allan Langer, Steve Walters, Gavin Allen, Troy Thomson.

Bottom Row (Left to Right): Michael Hillier, Tony Spencer, Robert Godbolt, Dr Matthew Hislop, Chris Gaviglio.

**COACH** Kevin Walters hopes to reinvigorate Queensland's State of Origin preparations with the new boss to be joined by a new-look Maroons staff for this year's series.

The 2016 Maroons will be under no illusions about this being the start of a new era for Queensland, with a host of new faces to join Walters in ushering in the new post-Meninga era. Assistant coach Anthony Siebold, physical performance manager Chris Gaviglio, team medico Dr Matthew Hislop and physiotherapist Rob Godbolt will join Walters on the Queensland staff for 2016.

They will join old hands Trevor Gilmeister (assistant coach), Allan Langer (trainer), Steve Walters (manager), Gavin Allen (manager), Troy Thomson (high performance), Tony Spencer

(trainer) and Michael Hillier (media) on the Maroons' off-field staff.

Walters said while it was disappointing to let go of long-term Maroons staffers Michael Hagan, Jason Hetherington, Dr Roy Saunders and Scott Thornton – who had worked under Mal during the previous 10 years – he felt the changes were needed to re-energise their preparations.

“The main reason for the changes was to freshen up the playing group, more than anything,” Walters said.

“This was not about improving what had been done, or bringing in better people. That was not the issue for us at all.

“But we had an opportunity to bring in some new faces, to give the place a fresh coat of paint and to give the players some new

experiences in camp to keep them fresh and stimulated.

“The staff that I did have to let go were all about Queensland, and they performed brilliantly for Queensland over many years.

“That was very tough for me personally, having to make those phone calls. It was hard.

“But I knew it was the best thing for the team, and that is the most important thing. As difficult as it was, I just felt that it needed to be done.”

Walters said the appointment of Seibold, a former coach of the Queensland under-18s who is now an assistant coach at Manly, was a crucial plank in his coaching framework.

“My opinion is that you need someone on your Origin coaching staff that are working in club land week in and week out,” Walters said.

“They are the ones who are keeping up with the trends and tactics that are evolving in the game because they are immersed in it every day of the week. “Rugby league is such a dynamic product, I think even being removed from that cutting edge for as little as six months could really put you behind what the latest thinking is.

“When I took the Queensland job on, it meant that I was no longer working with an NRL club – and that meant that we did not have any staff members actively working in the NRL.

“I thought it would be silly for us not to have someone at the coalface, and Anthony ticks that box for us.

“Anthony brings a lot of qualities in a lot of areas that we needed as an assistant coach. But probably the biggest things that Anthony brings are his passion for coaching and his passion for Queensland.

“You can watch all the games on television that you like, and have all the notes in the world about who is doing what and playing what minutes, but you still have to have a feel for how coaches are running the game at the top level. Anthony is that guy for us.”







**GENO SAYS  
BILLY'S  
QUEENSLAND  
DAYS AREN'T  
OVER**

# FULLBACKING

DON'T worry, Queensland fans. You haven't seen the last of this.

Billy Slater's shocking recent run with injury means we won't get to see the Melbourne Storm sensation play for the Maroons again this season, but Queensland selector Gene Miles says there is no way Slater's Origin days are over.

"There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that Billy will not only get back on the field for Melbourne, but he will play for Queensland again," Gene said.

Slater's much-anticipated return to the NRL after six months out with a shoulder injury lasted only one week, when he hurt the same shoulder playing against the Dragons in Round 1.

Unfortunately for Billy, the news was not good – with another operation needed, and an eight-month recovery window destroying another season.

But the Innisfail product has vowed to fight back again, and Gene said Billy's professionalism and application meant there was no question about this latest setback being career-threatening.

"It has been a tough couple of years for Billy with injury. This latest setback means by the time he gets back

on the field he will have played one game in 18 months," Gene said.

"For anyone, that is a long time, but in the life of a footballer, it is doubly so.

"He is signed until the end of 2017, and knowing that he is closer to the end than the beginning, I think that will really drive him to get back to his best and go out on his terms, whenever that may be.

"You know he will do everything he can to get back, and I think everyone in the game would like to see him at his brilliant best again because even in that one game that he had for Melbourne, you could see that the time he had spent out of the game had not slowed him down or changed his game.



"He is a guy that somehow just keeps on improving. Early on in his career Billy, for all his natural brilliance, had a lot of things in his game to work on.

"He was never a strong passer of the ball from left to right. But he worked on that element of his game until he mastered it, and that is why he developed into the best attacking footballer in the game."

Gene said if Slater was fit and firing at Origin time in 2017, there would be no hesitation about putting him back in his cherished Maroon No.1 jersey.

"He is the type of guy that every player wants at the back for them, because you know he is just going to be so safe," he said.

"For the number of times there was speculation about Billy maybe losing his fullback jumper to Greg Inglis, I can tell you it has never been discussed at the Queensland selection table.

"If Billy is fit, he is the fullback.

"We have been very fortunate as selectors in recent times where we have been able to sit down and go: '1. Billy Slater, 2. Darius Boyd, 3. Greg Inglis, 4. Justin Hodges' and on and on it goes.

"All you were really waiting for was a clean bill of health.

"We know Billy will do whatever it takes to get his Queensland jersey back. We have full confidence in him doing it, too."



THE Former Origin Greats' Annual Charity Luncheon is back again, better than ever, in 2016.

Now firmly entrenched as a key part of Brisbane's sporting calendar, the FOGS Charity Lunch has grown to become a traditional part of the lead-up to Origin time in Brisbane.

Early indications are that the event will be attended by another sell-out crowd, meaning any friends of the FOGS who want to get in on the action will need to move fast.

Held at Suncorp Stadium the day before the Brisbane Origin game, it allows Maroons fans to get up close and personal with their heroes – with the Queensland team coaching staff in attendance.

And of course, there is the usual collection of rugby league legends in the audience, as well as great food and entertainment.



Pictures: Courtesy News Queensland

# MORE GREAT FUN ON THE MENU AT FOGS CHARITY LUNCH

"This year's lunch will be held in the lead-up to Origin II, which could be the decider, which always adds a little bit extra to the event," said FOGS Executive Chairman Gene Miles.

"We are locking all the details in now, and already the response has been extraordinary. It looks like once again we will be hosting a sell-out crowd of around 700 people, which is a terrific result.

"It is always the case at Origin time, but this year especially the focus will

really be on Queensland because one of the teams will have the chance to wrap the series up."

Gene said FOGS were pleased to announce popular comedian Darren Carr would be returning as the event's feature entertainment.

"Darren is bringing a whole new show to this year's lunch. He has always been a crowd favourite at the FOGS lunches, and I am sure he will be again this year," Gene said.

"I think what everyone wants when they come to these lunches is to have

a good time and be entertained.

"You know when Darren is on the bill, that is exactly what you are going to get. He's a great entertainment, and a very funny man.

"We always appreciate the tremendous support we receive from our fans and sponsors for this event, which raises a significant amount of money for very important charities that are helping to make a difference to the lives of Queenslanders.

"We look forward to seeing everyone there again."



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# HODGES READY FOR THE NEXT CHAPTER

**The fairytale finish escaped him, but  
Hodges happy after his 'great ride'**

JUSTIN Hodges wasn't about to get too self-indulgent. One fairytale in his swansong season was more than satisfying. A second would have been like winning Powerball.

Hodges may have been denied a victory lap in this year's NRL grand final, but the veteran centre walked into the sunset with fond memories of his dream finale with Queensland's Origin juggernaut.

In July, the 33-year-old celebrated one of the finest nights of his career when the Maroons thumped NSW 52-6 in the biggest drubbing in Origin history.

Farewell Hodgo, thanks for the memories.

A month later, he announced his impending retirement from the NRL.

Perhaps it was a decision inspired by his head-spinning Origin swansong. Perhaps his body screamed "no more".

Either way, the final weeks of Hodges' NRL career became a rolling tribute to one of Queensland's greatest backline weapons.

And while his good mate Johnathan Thurston broke his heart in the NRL decider to seal North Queensland's first premiership, Hodges leaves the game truly at ease,

knowing he left nothing in the tank.

"I can't complain, it's been a great ride," Hodges says.

"It would have been nice to go out with a premiership, but not everyone gets a fairytale ending. At least I had one in Origin with a Queensland side I felt lucky to be a part of.

"I was just a boy from Cairns with a big dream to play rugby league and I achieved that. I just wanted to go out on my terms and I feel I did that."

He may not appreciate it now, but the gravity of Hodges' NRL portfolio will sink in with each passing day in retirement. His record is testimony to his brilliance and longevity: 16 seasons at the highest level, 251 first-grade games, 24 Origin matches for Queensland and 13 Tests for Australia.

He won two premierships, first with the Roosters in 2002 before his triumph with the Broncos four years later. All up, he scored 99 NRL career tries, created countless more single-handedly with his trademark loping stride, lethal fend, raw strength and crisp footwork.

Such was Hodges' talent, Broncos coach Wayne Bennett was left devastated when his young backline star



sensationally quit Brisbane at age 19 to join the Roosters in his quest to play fullback.

Bennett was so filthy he axed Hodges to reserve grade, sparking a feud with his mother. But when Hodges became homesick in Sydney, Bennett didn't hesitate to bring his footballing prodigal son home in 2005.

A decade later, the hatchet buried, their careers intertwined beautifully when Bennett returned to the Broncos and installed Hodges as his captain.

"I saw him change so much, he really matured, he earned the job," Bennett says.

"I knew Justin wouldn't survive in Sydney. It wasn't his place. And when he wanted to come home, I did what I did because it was the right thing to do.

"I have so much admiration for him as a person and a player.

"Pretty much the Broncos' motto in the '90s was always: 'Once you cross the white line, you do your absolute best for the club'.

"That's been what Hodgo's lived by, regardless of where he's played, who he's played for.

"Sometimes, I'd see him the day before and think he's no chance of playing good tomorrow but he'll turn up on game day.

"He believed in that, not letting his teammates down. He lived it every day."

Hodges admits he saw the end a few times, most notably in 2013, when he ruptured his Achilles for the second time in three years. Along the way, he suffered shoulder injuries, knee problems, hamstring tears and ankle sprains, but every time Hodges' love for the game pulled him through.

"To be honest there were a couple of times I thought of retiring ... I would be lying if I said there wasn't," Hodges said.

"With my Achilles, there were times I thought, 'This is too hard'.



"But the passion of playing football always drove me to come back."

It was evident in 2002, when Hodges was axed by the Maroons after a nightmare debut in which he gifted NSW two tries with two wayward passes in his own in-goal.

That night would have broken lesser men. But Hodges learned and endured. He went on to become a key member of Queensland's record-breaking dynasty under Mal Meninga.

"Justin is up with the best centres I've seen and that includes the Origin arena," Maroons coach Meninga said.

"People like to be judged by their peers in a positive way and Justin is as good as I've seen.

"He loved putting the Maroon jersey on and he just loves competing, which you need at Origin level.

"I'm proud of him and thrilled with what he's achieved. Hopefully he moves on to bigger and brighter things."

Bennett insists Hodges will not be lost to rugby league, outlining plans for him to work at the Broncos next season, possibly as a backs coach.

"Justin feared the future because he didn't know what it was," he said. "Like a lot of guys, he is institutionalised in rugby league and they have to start a new life without football.

"But Justin has a lot to offer and he will have a place at the Broncos ... we'll make sure of that."





# FOGS ARTIE ACADEMY & BEYOND THE BRONCOS JOIN FORCES



THE ultra-successful ARTIE Academy has started a new era for education in Queensland, with the Former Origin Greats joining in a partnership with the Brisbane Broncos to support the state's Indigenous students.

This year, the ARTIE Academy and the Beyond the Broncos program will join forces in eight State High Schools in South-East Queensland – stretching from Logan to Caboolture – to improve school attendance and readiness for Indigenous students.

Funding for the ARTIE Academy was again backed by the Australian Government through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

FOGS and the Broncos saw an opportunity to join forces to achieve more results for at-risk students.

The partnership will now see the ARTIE Academy work with students in Years 7, 8 and 9 to develop and build fundamental skills. Students in Years 10, 11 and 12 will work with the Beyond the Broncos program to

help them prepare for life after school.

Andrew Peach, Executive Principal at Marsden State High School, said the new structure would help younger students stay engaged in their academic careers.

"The FOGS, through the ARTIE Academy, have always provided strong support for our school and our students," Andrew said.

"The move to work more specifically with our junior students has provided the opportunity to develop positive relationships and increased engagement, supporting our students to be successful in the classroom.

"As a school we really value the work and support from the FOGS in helping our kids to be successful and look forward to the ongoing impact of this excellent program."

FOGS Executive Chairman Gene Miles said the new partnership with the Broncos would ensure that all available resources are being used to create more positive outcomes for students.

"We have had an exciting development with a new

collaboration with the Brisbane Broncos, working together on Indigenous education, and I think it is a partnership that will really deliver significant rewards for everyone – but especially the schools and students," Gene said.

"This collaboration is the best way for both of our organisations to achieve a common goal – and that is to provide better futures for young Queenslanders.

"Currently, in the majority of our schools, the ARTIE Academy looks after Years 7, 8 and 9. We then hand them over to the Broncos' program, which handles Years 10, 11 and 12 to help transition them into working life.

"It is a system that is working well. We have so many success stories from the good work that the ARTIE Academy has done over the years, and I am sure that our new partnership with the Broncos will ensure there are plenty more good stories in the years to come."





TALKING to Thomas Draper, it is easy to understand why kids in the ARTIE Academy program are inspired to follow him on the path to success.

Queenslander Magazine first caught up with Thomas in 2014, when we did a story on how he was helping young Indigenous students strive to create better lives for themselves, their families and their communities.

A client representative for Arrow Energy, Thomas first came to the attention of FOGS when he told his personal story at the 2012 Toowoomba Expo forum.

"Jess (Toye, ARTIE Academy Program Manager) got in contact with me and asked if I wanted to talk to the kids about leadership," Thomas said.

"I have my own ideas about leadership, and I don't know whether they are right or not. But I just know what it takes to be effective, that is all.

"When I talk to kids, I am not looking for followers. Never have. When I talk to kids, I am looking for leaders.

Thomas is a big believer in the mantra "what goes around, comes around", and says the personal rewards for him being involved in the ARTIE Academy are more than money can buy.

"To be honest, the opportunity that the FOGS gave me has opened up a lot of other opportunities for me as well," he said.

"I do a lot of work with a number of other community organisations now, so working with the FOGS was a really good start for me.

"I just feel in myself that I have to give back. I believe in what goes around, comes around, you know? I know that helping these kids out now will come back to me someday, so I am happy to do it.

"I can honestly say that some of the most powerful experiences of my life

## THOMAS CONTINUES TO LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Since then, he has been more and more involved with the work of FOGS, helping to motivate and inspire kids who, like Thomas once did, dreamt of making it big in a dream career.

Thomas is now working with the ARTIE Academy's "ARTIE Greats" students, who are on track to becoming leaders in their schools in 2017.

The program encourages these students to strive for success and complete school, and be a role model for younger students.

Thomas said learning how to lead was an important lesson for all students.



*Thomas Draper & Morayfield State High School ARTIE Greats Students*

have been through working with these kids.

"Seeing the shift of thinking in their eyes, and their change in self-belief, it is a powerful experience.

"I have had hard-knock kids break down in tears right in front of my eyes, and that is not because they see me as a leader, a mentor, or a role model.

"It is because I am able to give them something they have never had in their lives: Hope.

"I can show them that with hard work and the right attitude, anything is possible. That's what it's all about for me."

## NORTH ROCKHAMPTON STATE HIGH SCHOOL JOINS ARTIE ACADEMY

THE Former Origin Greats' ARTIE Academy will achieve a long-held ambition in 2016, with the introduction of the program into North Rockhampton State High School.

This year, the ARTIE Academy will be supporting Rockhampton State High School and North Rockhampton State High School under the program's educational umbrella.

The move into a second school in the Central Queensland city is a significant one for the ARTIE Academy, which has been keen to establish a relationship with North Rockhampton State High School for some time.

This year, under the new priorities of the ARTIE Academy's funding contract, North Rockhampton State High School is now able to come on board.

Already, the results of the new partnership have been promising. The introduction of the ARTIE Academy has been warmly received by the staff and students, and the academic results delivered so far indicate the ARTIE Academy will continue its statewide success in changing the academic careers of students our latest school.







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# FAREWELL TO TWO GREAT MEN

Rugby League recently lost two of its finest men and proudest servants with the sad passing of John Crane and Des Hancock

Both men were passionate, long-time supporters of rugby league, and the game in Queensland was saddened by their passing after battles with illness – John in December, and Des in February this year.

John was the former sponsorship manager at the Former Origin Greats, and played an integral role in the growth of the organisation, including with programs like The 1980 Initiative.

FOGS Executive Chairman Gene Miles said it was no coincidence that Crane's tenure at the FOGS was the period where the organisation enjoyed its greatest period of rapid growth and expansion.

"The sponsors all liked dealing with him, and he always handled himself really well in the meetings we had," Gene said.

"Crane was my go-to guy. He was the king of doing deals and contra, and he just loved doing all that stuff.

"He was obviously also the guy that looked after our 1980 Initiative group, and he just loved being involved with them, organising dinners, taking them out on the field – all that sort of stuff."

Gene's relationship with John stretches back nearly three decades.

"We first met at Power's (Brewery) back in the early days, where he was the marketing manager," Gene said.

"He worked for the Broncos for a long time while we were playing, and once he finished up there he came and worked for us here at FOGS.

"He was with us here for eight years. We miss him every day.

"The girls loved him in here and he got along with them really well. He was always great fun to have around."

Des Hancock too is a man with long ties to rugby league, but also to the wider Queensland community.

A former general manager at Rothman's, Des was the man who hung the cherished Rothman's Medal around the neck of Queensland's finest footballers – including a young Gene Miles in 1987.

Among his other roles, Des was also a former Chairman of the Lang Park Trust, a board member with the Queensland Government's Major Sports Facilities Authority, a former Chairman of the Queensland Winter Racing Carnival and a former Chairman of the Queensland Eye Institute Foundation.

"Des was one of the great guys, he gave me my first job – with Rothman's in 1982 after I got back from the Kangaroo tour,"

"I had only been in Brisbane for 18 months, and didn't have a real job – just some work that the guys from Wynnum had organised.

"People don't understand the influence he had on the game here. Everything that was happening in rugby league in those days was backed by Winfield through Des.

"There was the Winfield Cup in Brisbane and in Sydney, the Winfield State League, the Winfield State of Origin.

"Des was the man who presented me with my Rothman's Medal back in 1987. They were big nights.

"Des would rock up the next day, and the rest of us would be as sick as 10 men. But in would come Des puffing on a dart first thing in the morning.

"He always made a point of turning up first thing after a big night. He might not have lasted too long, because he would close the door behind him once everyone had seen he was there, but that is the way he led his team at Rothman's."

Both men will be sadly missed, and the Former Origin Greats extend our sympathy to their friends and families.



Pictures: Courtesy News Queensland

# STAGG PARTY

Unsung backrower David Stagg has a lot to be proud of in a career that netted two grand finals, one premiership and one cherished Queensland jersey.

## DAVID STAGG

FOG No.154

Clubs: Brisbane Broncos,  
Canterbury Bulldogs

Queensland: 1 Origin  
(2006)

Position: Lock, Centre,  
Second Row





DAVID Stagg has come full circle.

More than 20 years ago, well before he carved out a highly-successful NRL career he never expected, Stagg took the first steps in his rugby league journey with the Norths Aspley club.

So it is only fitting that today, a generation later, Stagg should find himself back where he started.

One year into his NRL retirement, the former Queensland Origin workhorse is giving back to the code as a development officer for the Broncos.

Aptly, he's been placed at Aspley, helping mentor hundreds of junior footballers, including six-year-old son Noah, who, in his maiden year of rugby league, is proudly upholding the Stagg legacy.

"It's great to see your son playing the game you played and loved," Stagg says. "I didn't really push Noah into it, but he's grown up around the game, it's in his blood I guess.

"It's funny how things go around in big circles. Aspley was my junior club and here I am back involved with their juniors.

"I'm enjoying life without footy so far. I'm not putting my body through the physical demands I did for so long. I'm not missing the NRL just yet ... but that might change in 12 months."

If any aspiring NRL star is searching for a role model, they could do worse than turn to Stagg.



For 12 years, he was the personification of hard work: a 90kg tough-tackling back-rower who admirably punched above his weight, tackling monster forwards some 20kg heavier.

Stagg pounded weights to bulk up and keep pace with the modern game.

Along the way, he paid a price – his knees, shoulder and ankles all felt the wrath of the muscled-up forward hulks.

But for all the pain and sacrifice he was rewarded with a fine NRL resume: 205

first-grade games, two grand-final appearances, a premiership ring with the Broncos in 2006 and his one and only Origin game for Queensland in the same season.

When Mal Meninga's glorious reign at the Maroons began 10 years ago, he handed an Origin debut to Stagg.

At 22, he partnered Matt Scott in the back row.

And while he was axed after Queensland's

gut-wrenching 17-16 loss in the series opener, Stagg will always cherish his contribution to the Maroons team Meninga ultimately made great.

"I remember getting the phone call to say I had made the team. I didn't know what on earth to do, so I rang big Petero (Civoniceva, Maroons veteran) and he helped me get sorted," Stagg recalls.

"You hear everyone talk about the pace of Origin. It was something I couldn't prepare myself for, you just can't grasp

what it's about until you get out there.

"Before I knew it, we were in the sheds at halftime and then game was over.

"I remember the game well ... for all the wrong reasons. Brett Finch came in at the last minute for NSW and he decided to have a blinder by kicking the winning field goal.

"I was hopeful I would get another chance. Myself and Matty Scott were the back-rowers in that game, but we both got dropped. Tonie Carroll and Carl Webb came into the side for Game Two so Mal went for more experience.

"I never got back into the Queensland side, but now that I'm retired, I will always treasure that one game."

It is testament to Stagg's longevity that he played two grand finals for two different clubs six years apart. In 2012, he was a member of the Canterbury side which lost 14-4 to Melbourne.

It gave him perspective after his premiership joy in 2006, when Stagg was the unsung hero filling in at right centre for Justin Hodges, whose shift to fullback helped the Broncos upset the Storm 15-8.

"The two grand finals are very special," Stagg says.

"At that time, I didn't appreciate what the Broncos achieved. I was only 22 at the time, but the second time around in 2012, I was at the Bulldogs as a senior player and I really soaked up the experience.

"In junior footy, I never made any Queensland sides, so to go on to play 200 first grade games, win a premiership and play Origin ... I reckon that's pretty satisfying."

# BIG MAL'S TEST OF NERVES

HE has done more as a player and coach than most people in rugby league could ever dream of. But that does not mean Mal Meninga is afraid to own up to a heavy bout of nerves in his new assignment as coach of the Australian Kangaroos.

After an incredible 10-year reign as Queensland coach that delivered an unthinkable nine series wins, Big Mal has started a season for the first time in a decade not worrying about shaping the Maroons for another crack at NSW.

And he admits the feeling is a little bit strange.

"Well, I am coaching earlier this year with the Test team, so I have had to think about getting my game-face on a bit earlier this year," Mal says with a laugh.

"I am a bit more nervous at this time of the year than I have been in the past, as you would expect changing jobs after 10 years.

"But the flipside is, not being involved with Origin this year, the pressure has come off a little. Just things like the weight of expectation are not there this year.

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"Obviously coaching the Australian side comes with its own expectations and pressures, and you can't escape that.

"But the run of success that the Queensland team enjoyed over the past decade created a bit of a unique situation where you were under pressure to match and maintain the standards and results you had achieved in the past.

"Obviously when you are dealing with a contest as hard-fought and close as Origin, that is a lot of pressure to carry.

"So personally, I am a little bit more relaxed heading into this year, but at the same time anxious about what lies ahead with the Kangaroos."

As the first dedicated Kangaroos coach, Mal has been charged with rebuilding the national team's brand, returning Australia to the top of the world rankings and – at the same time – working on propagating the game at an international level.

On top of this, and his regular newspaper column with The Courier-Mail, Mal is also this year working with Fox Sports who use Origin's greatest coach to analyse game plans and tactics in the NRL.

"I am watching more footy than ever before," Mal says. "Now working with Fox Sports, I am doing a lot more homework on games and analysing closely what teams are doing and how they are playing, as opposed to just keeping an eye on the Queenslanders.

"As Queensland coach, I would always be watching the Broncos, Cowboys, Titans and Storm very closely. But now as Australian coach, the games between the Bulldogs and the Eels are just as important to me.

"The analytical stuff I am doing with Fox works hand-in-hand with what I am doing as Australian coach, and helps when it comes to breaking down game plans and seeing what players and coaches are doing."

Mal admits it has been an adjustment keeping tabs on the form and prospects of NSW players he has been coaching against for a decade.

"I've found I have to change my thinking a lot," he said.

"It's no longer a question of 'does a player qualify for Queensland?'. A guy like Semi Radradra has to enter your thinking as well.

"Now Semi is obviously not eligible for either Queensland or NSW at Origin level, but he is an Australian resident and has elected to play for Australia. You have to have things like that on your radar all the time.

"It is a little bit different, but I am enjoying the challenge.

"You have to get your combinations right as well obviously. We have so many good players to choose from. It is about getting the best players in the best form who will play at their best with the blokes alongside them.

"There is a bit more homework to do, but it is good fun."



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# TODD IS THE RIGHT MAN FOR THE JOB

KANGAROOS coach Mal Meninga says the Australian Rugby League Commission got it right by appointing Todd Greenberg as the NRL's new CEO.

After months of searching, following the resignation of Dave Smith from the top job, Greenberg was finally confirmed in March as the man to lead rugby league in Australia into a new era.

While most in the game saw him as the logical choice for the position, Greenberg still had to fend off a hot field of external candidates to get the job he was earmarked for back in his days as CEO of the Canterbury Bulldogs.

After experimenting with an "outsider" in Smith for league's top job, Meninga said Greenberg's affinity with the game made him the best choice as CEO.

"I know for a fact that we needed a rugby league person to be the chief executive, and we have that in Todd," Mal said. "He has the game of rugby league at heart, and he understands the game.

"One thing that Todd brings to the table, which not a lot of candidates would have had, is the confidence of the game's main players – that being the chairmen and CEOs of the clubs.

"All of the clubs have dealt with Todd at their level from when he was the CEO at the Bulldogs, and they've dealt with him working for the NRL and they all have universal respect for him and the job that he does.

"The great benefit for rugby league is that he is not going to take a matter of weeks or months until he gets his feet under the desk and gets up to speed with what is going on.

"He knows the game inside out, and knows what needs to be done for it to reach its potential, and he can get to work

right away."

Greenberg's former role as the NRL's Head of Football meant that he not only hired Meninga, but worked closely alongside him to begin the rebuild of the Kangaroos brand and international footy.

"(ARLC Chairman) John Grant said earlier in the year that the new CEO also had to have a focus on the international game, and that is where I get excited by having someone like Todd being involved there," Mal said. "He understands what we are trying to do to lift the profile of the game internationally and to lift the profile of the Kangaroos.

"I have been working with his former section in the NRL's football department, so he knows exactly what we are doing and what we are trying to achieve."

Mal said Greenberg's rise to CEO was also vindication that rugby league did not need to shop elsewhere to find people with world-class skills.

"His appointment is also a wonderful advertisement for the game that we have people of his quality that we are able to promote from within," Mal said. "He is 'one of us' and has been for a long time.

"The NRL is fortunate that we already had a man of his great skills as an administrator to appoint in-house for one of the best sporting jobs in the country.

"For the Commission to show their confidence in someone from within to run the game gives everyone in the game a lot of confidence I think. We don't need to go outside the game to find the right person to run the game because we are developing people with those skills in the game itself. It shows everyone working in rugby league that if you work hard, you can make it to the top.



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# ALL SYSTEMS GO FOR NEW FOGS HQ



CONSTRUCTION has begun on the new home of the Former Origin Greats, with the new administration building on Castlemaine Street expected to be completed later this year.

The new building, across the road from Suncorp Stadium, will be part of a new precinct in the famous Milton street, with National Rugby League, Queensland Rugby League and Men of League organisations expected to join the FOGS with new administration bases there this year.

FOGS Executive Chairman Gene Miles said it was exciting after so much time and planning that work had finally begun on the new home base for FOGS.

"They started work in the middle of March, and the great thing is that all of the big crowds that have been coming to Suncorp Stadium for Broncos matches have been able to see some action on the site with construction underway," Gene said.

"There is a growing awareness now that that will be the new home for the Former Origin Greats.

"We are hopeful of being in there to start 2017. At the moment we are looking at a nine-month build, which will put completion sometime around

November or December of this year, but there are inevitably delays with any building project.

"It is made doubly-difficult on Castlemaine Street, given there are so many events on at the Stadium that result in the streets being shut off for long periods."

Gene said the FOGS were currently working with leasing agencies to find tenants who wanted to move into the new FOGS building.

"We will have three floors of office space in the new building, and our organisation will occupy probably half of one of those floors," Gene said.

"The rest will then be leased commercially to other organisations.

"Our leasing agencies have started putting it out there to show off what we have available."

One of the features of the new FOGS offices will be a balcony overlooking Castlemaine Street, which will have a kitchen and bar to accommodate functions, and an entertaining area.

"It will be great for us, but also great for the Castlemaine Street precinct," Gene said.

"It is getting a bit tired down here, and could use a bit of a dress-up.

"With the QRL and NRL moving in up the road, our new building, and the establishment of a brewery and restaurant as well, the area will really get a good kick along."





# TACKLE ONE: WE HAVE TO USE OUR HEADS WITH CONCUSSION TESTS

with Trevor Gillmeister

CONCUSSION has become the hot topic in world sports at the moment, not just rugby league, and it is an issue worth being concerned about.

Certainly, I don't think league faces as big an issue dealing with concussion as American football.



Given they had to introduce rules banning the use of their helmets as weapons, it seems obvious they are probably going to deal with more head injuries than rugby league.

But of course every weekend we see instances of NRL players being knocked silly in a tackle, and taken from the field for assessment.

It is this process, where the players are given cognitive tests by doctors to make sure they are right to return to the field, that is the best way of handling head knocks.

Sometimes on the field, you can be hit hard and left stunned, without being knocked-out or concussed, and you come good after a few seconds to get your bearings.

But obviously there are occasions where a knock-out can be far more serious, and it makes sense that the decisions about whether a player is ok to keep playing are taken out of his hands and left to the professionals.

The health issues being talked about by former NFL players in the States more often than not relate to multiple concussions or head injuries, and that is obviously something we need to watch over here as well.

Copping a one-off knock because of a head-clash or an accidental knee is obviously less of a danger when compared to someone who is regularly being knocked unconscious because they're getting their heads in the wrong spot when tackling.

Multiple concussions are where there are real concerns, and the league and its doctors may need to intervene for the player's safety.

In Australian boxing, if a fighter is knocked out and loses consciousness for less than a minute, he is banned from fighting or sparring for 90 days.

If he is unconscious for more than a minute, that ban doubles to 180 days.

Now, we are not really comparing apples with apples here, because boxing obviously involves more direct contact with the head.



But we have seen in the past where a league player gets a head knock one week, and then – whether it be a lack of confidence or whatever – follows up with another one or more in the following weeks.

In those cases, it might pay to sit that player out for a week or two so they can recalibrate their mind and technique and move on without any worries.







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