



QUEENSLANDER

Official Magazine of Queensland's Former Origin Greats

MAGAZINE

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UN FOR GETTABLE

**In 2022, Queensland
celebrated our wins,
and mourned our losses**

FOGS
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FORMER ORIGIN GREATS

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Cover Picture: Courtesy of NewsCorp

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN

Gene Miles » FOG #28

In what should have been a year of true celebration for rugby league in Queensland, we instead find ourselves reflecting on a bittersweet 12 months for the game in the Sunshine State.

While the incredible State of Origin series win by Billy Slater's Maroons was breathtaking in its brilliance, our celebrations were tempered by a period of genuine mourning and tragedy at the loss of Paul Green, Barry Muir and Liam Hampson.

Greeny's passing was the catalyst for some bigger conversations rugby league needed to have about mental health, the long-term effects of concussions, the scourge of Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy – commonly known as CTE – and the impact of dementia.

In May, Wally Lewis, Trevor Gillmeister and myself joined Royce Simmons for 28km of his charity walk to raise money for his foundation that is helping fund research into dementia, which Royce was diagnosed with earlier this year, and CTE.

The next day, we visited Steve Mortimer, who this year entered full-time care as his own fight with dementia takes its toll.

It was two days where the devastating impact of this dreaded disease really hit home, seeing two champions of our era bravely fighting a battle they cannot win.

But the word "conversations" is important here. It is so important that we all start talking more about these issues – to our mates, to our loved ones, to doctors, to anyone.

In this edition of Queenslander Magazine, we have tried to do just that – by starting conversations about mental health, and providing some answers to the CTE riddle by talking to one of Australia's leading brain experts, Professor Michael Buckland.

But please remember, if you are concerned, or feel like you are struggling, or you suspect someone else is, the first thing you need to do is just start talking. It's that simple.

Billy Slater's success as Queensland coach should not have really taken us by surprise.

He brought all of the characteristics and attention to detail that made him such a great player to his new job as coach.

Before the series, he made contact with every NRL player eligible for Queensland – just letting them know that they were being watched, every week, and telling them to be ready in case Queensland needed them.

Billy gave seven of those players their first Queensland jerseys this year, and that they adapted so quickly to Origin is a credit to him as a coach.

What the Maroons produced this year, especially in Origin III with everything going against them, was unbelievable.

Those Queensland players gave everything they had because they didn't want to let Billy down. There is no higher praise for a coach than that.

At FOGS HQ, we have enjoyed another year of terrific progress, renewing our partnerships with the Australian Government and Queensland Government, the addition of new partners such as Transurban, and the strengthening of existing relationships with the likes of the Department of Transport and Main Roads, and RACQ.

We have built on the critical work being done by the ARTIE Academy, and introduced new programs like the Transurban ARTIE No.1 Driving School.

You will read about all of these success stories inside this edition.

It was another busy but successful year. And this year, more than most, we should all take the time to appreciate and be grateful for all the good things we have in our lives.

And we should never forget, as our much-loved Founding Chairman would say, how great it is to be a Queenslander.

Merry Christmas, and a happy new year to all.

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Pictures: Courtesy of NewsCorp, QRL

ORIGIN WRAP-UP

Billy's Babes Deliver A Maroon Miracle

He had the hot hand as a Queensland Origin player.

And Billy Slater proved he also has the Midas touch in the world of coaching after working his magic to mastermind Queensland's epic 2022 series boil over of the Blues.

There were fears the Maroons were in a state of disarray after the Queensland Rugby League took a major gamble by blooding Slater as a rookie coach following NSW's emphatic series rout last year.

For all his brilliance as a player – Slater is widely regarded as rugby league's greatest ever fullback – the Storm champion was totally unproven in the coaching sphere.

Granted, Slater was a Queensland legend. He had won a staggering nine series from 31 games spanning 14 years.

Slater simply got Origin.

But could 'Billy the Kid' step up as a mentor of men and implement a blueprint to topple a rampant NSW team sniffing a Blues dynasty?

We should never have doubted him.

With a band of rookies and a coaching dream team comprising Cameron Smith, Johnathan Thurston and Josh Hannay, Slater delivered on debut, steering the Maroons to a thrilling 2-1 series win that further enhanced his status as a Queensland Origin talisman.

"If I think of one word to sum up the whole series, I would say ... proud," Slater said.

"I look back on what we did and I just felt so proud, not so much of my achievements, but proud to be a part of such a great group of guys, what we stood for, and the effort they all put in.

I wanted this team to play for Queensland, and the people of their state.

"They bought in from Day 1, and we played with that Queensland spirit through the whole series."

Following the stunning series win, Slater was nominated for Coach of the Year honours at the annual Queensland Sport Awards, while the Maroons were finalists in the Team of the Year category.

"It's great recognition for the team," Slater said of the QSport nominations.



"Between the players and the coaching staff around me, you are only as good as the people beside you – and the nomination is thanks to the group.

If I got anything right, I feel it was getting the right staff and getting the right players for Queensland.

Supported by Queensland's selectors, Slater put faith in youth, blooded seven debutants across the three games, while appointing Smith, Origin's most-capped player, and Hannay, one

of the NRL's most promising assistants, to his coaching staff.

Coach Slater made an instant impact. The Maroons shocked NSW in Game One in Sydney, coming from behind to pull off a 16-10 upset.

And while the Maroons' curse in Perth returned, spanked 44-12 at Optus Stadium, Billy's Babes underlined their spirit in the decider, defying the odds to stun NSW 22-12 as 52,000 Queenslanders went berserk at Suncorp Stadium.

This wasn't a win. This was a Maroons miracle.

Slater had lost star pivot Cameron Munster and winger Murray Taulagi to Covid in the lead up, while Selwyn Cobbo and Lindsay Collins were knocked out in the opening four minutes.

"That last game was simply remarkable," Slater said. "We had to pick ourselves off the canvas after losing in Perth, and there was so much drama and chaos in the opening stages of the decider. But the guys never stopped believing.

I learned a lot through the experience as an Origin coach. It's very different to playing. You can't just worry about yourself.

"Sometimes Origin is about the big picture. The amount of Queensland people I have spoken to, they say that period of the year made them extremely happy and put a smile on their face.

"That's what it's all about for me – playing a style of game that resonates with the Queensland people ... and we won with that style."

ORIGIN I

QLD 16

(D Gagai, D Cherry-Evans, Valentine Homes tries; Holmes 2 goals)

NSW 10

(J Wighton, C Murray tries; N Cleary goal) at Accor Stadium, Sydney.

Crowd: 80,512

ORIGIN II

NSW 44

(Cleary 2, Burton, To'o, Tupou, Luai, Crichton tries; Cleary 8 goals)

defeated

QLD 12

(Kaufusi, Munster tries; Holmes 2 goals) at Optus Stadium, Perth.

Crowd: 59,368

ORIGIN III

QLD 22

(Holmes, Capewell, Ponga, Hunt tries; Holmes 3 goals)

defeated

NSW 12

(Luai, Saifiti tries; Cleary 2 goals) at Suncorp Stadium.

Crowd: 52,385





Pictures: Courtesy of NewsCorp

MAROONS' MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

2022 Queensland Maroons Debutants

They were the seven Queensland rookies handed a baptism of fire by new coach Billy Slater – and ‘Billy’s Babes’ revelled in the code’s toughest arena to underpin the Maroons’ remarkable 2022 series defeat of the Blues.

Just 12 months ago, Broncos duo Pat Carrigan and Selwyn Cobbo and the Cowboys posse of Reuben Cotter, Jeremiah Nanai, Murray Taulagi, Tom Dearden and Tom Gilbert had a better chance of winning Powerball than playing State of Origin.

But with Slater prepared to back youth in his quest to reclaim Queensland pride, the super seven basked in an Origin debutants’ ball in 2022.

Energetic, hungry, passionate and fearless, the NRL rookies morphed into Queensland super heroes. None were better than Carrigan, who set the tone from Game One and finished with the Wally Lewis Medal as player of the series.

“It’s easy to say I showed faith in guys like Reuben and Carrigan, but they were the ones that gave me faith and trust in them,” Slater said.

“A guy like Reuben, he was on my mind very early in the year, well before anyone even mentioned his name for State of Origin.

“I just loved his work ethic and his effort plays, and Pat Carrigan’s story over the past 12 months is inspirational.

“He did his ACL last year, had a knee reconstruction, then he came back this season and had another knee injury. But when he came back just before the Origin series, he hit the ground running straight away.

“Reuben and Pat are just professionals. When it came to blooding them, we had no hesitation because they have brilliant habits in their game and we knew they would stand up in the Origin arena.

“**For Pat to walk away with the Wally Lewis Medal, it was truly remarkable.**

Cowboys backrower Nanai excelled at just 19 years of age.

Broncos winger Cobbo set up a try for Dane Gagai with one of his first touches in Origin I, while Gilbert and Dearden showed nerves of steel after being blooded in the series decider at Suncorp.

Dearden, in particular, was magnificent – producing a flawless game at five-eighth to help engineer Queensland’s 22-12 upset after star pivot Cameron Munster was struck down by Covid.

“I remember knocking on Tom’s door to tell him he was playing for Cameron. He simply said: ‘I won’t let you down,’” Slater said.

“Tom epitomises everything about Queensland. He is such a competitor.

“As coaches, it meant so much to bring these young guys through and let them experience the feeling of a winning Queensland dressing room.

“**There’s not much like it in life, and they have so many years ahead.**



THREE FOR THE ROAD

Maroons Trio Off To Greener Pastures

Queensland rugby league said farewell to three loyal Maroons servants this year, with Josh McGuire and NRLW duo Meg Ward and Kody House hanging up their boots on Australian soil.

After 13 years in the NRL furnace, McGuire will embark a new chapter next year, with the former Broncos, Cowboys and Dragons enforcer joining English Super League club Warrington.

The firebrand prop amassed 14 Origin games from 2015-19, winning three of five series, and ends his NRL career with 259 NRL games and eight Tests to his name.

“I remember Josh coming through as a kid at the Aspley Devils, and he prided himself on being the hard man on the field,” said FOG No.89 Ben Ikin.

“I wasn’t sure if Josh would end up being big enough to keep playing the same way in the NRL.

“He wasn’t one of the bigger front-rowers, but he had a great reputation of playing above his weight.

“He just made it his business to impose himself on the contest every time he took the field. Sometimes he stepped over the line, but that was the risk you ran when you had a bloke like Josh who wanted to win every contest he was part of.

“**Josh was in the top echelon of prop forwards, and he was more than just an enforcer.**

“Josh mixed it with the best forwards in the game for a long period of time.

“He brought all those same attributes to the Origin arena.”

Another former Bronco, women’s star Ward, announced her retirement at age 28. The winger or centre won three premierships with the Broncos, and played two matches for Queensland and four Tests for Australia.

Ward has moved into coaching as an assistant to the Queensland under-19s and Broncos NRLW sides.

“I only saw ‘Wardy’ from a distance as a player, but I got to know her as an assistant coach of the Broncos NRLW team in 2022,” Ikin said.

“She is high energy, an infectious personality and she just has this burning desire to win. Her energy and passion is a testament to her character.”

Ward’s one-time Broncos teammate House also decided to draw the curtain after a decade in the game, highlighted by her Test debut in 2017 and four Origin games for the Maroons.

“It was so tempting to play on,” said House, who recently completed study to be an exercise physiologist.

“**For me, I have given so much of my life and been so selfish for 10 years playing rugby league and it’s time where I can have that family time now and focus on a career.**



Pictures: Courtesy of NRL Imagery



WOMEN IN ORIGIN

Tahnee Says Maroons Ready To Bounce Back From Heartbreak

The future of the Queensland Maroons is bright despite the State of Origin women's campaign ending in heartbreak in 2022.

The emergence of outstanding Maroons debutants Emily Bass (wing) and Evania Pelite (centre) in the 20-14 Origin loss to NSW was certainly a highlight.

Both have a superb pedigree, with 27-year-old Pelite an Olympic gold medal winner in 2016 with the Australian Rugby Sevens side.

Bass, a former Queensland Reds union player, has been a sensation for the Brisbane Broncos.

Both have impressed Maroons head coach Tahnee Norris.

"It was exciting to be able to bring new players through the program this year, and they are going to be big talents for us in the future," Norris said.

"Evania has some special skill sets about her that will enable her to play a number of different positions, because she is such a strong ball-runner.

“Even though she has won an Olympic gold medal, she totally gets how much it means to wear that Queensland jersey.”

"Emily is just an exciting prospect. In club football she will play fullback, but for us it will be wing for the majority of the time. She is new to the sport of rugby league, and has a big future.

"Culturally they are both fantastic to put straight into a Maroons jersey. They get it, and are through-and-through Queenslanders."

Norris said it was "tough" to go so close in the Origin showdown this year after a gritty 8-6 win in 2021.

The game went down to the wire. With minutes remaining, Shenae Ciesiolka thought she had scored to put Queensland in the lead after Julie



Robinson had magnificently caught an Ali Bragginsshaw bomb and offloaded.

On review, Robinson was correctly ruled off-side, but it was still a bitter pill to swallow.

"Culturally, we probably had the best camp and lead-in to the game. So to lose such a tight game was disheartening," Norris said.

"If we didn't have two conversions hit the goalpost, we wouldn't have needed that try to get in front

"It was also really tough to lose (prop) Steph Hancock at halftime to an HIA.

"Ali Bragginsshaw was outstanding for us, and Robbo (Julia Robinson) was really consistent as ever. You can't fault her in any game. She always puts her heart and soul into it."



The close nature of Origin games is now the norm, which is why the women's program has captured the attention of the wider public.

"It was that close, and that is just the quality of Origin at the moment, which is a really good thing for the women's game," Norris said.

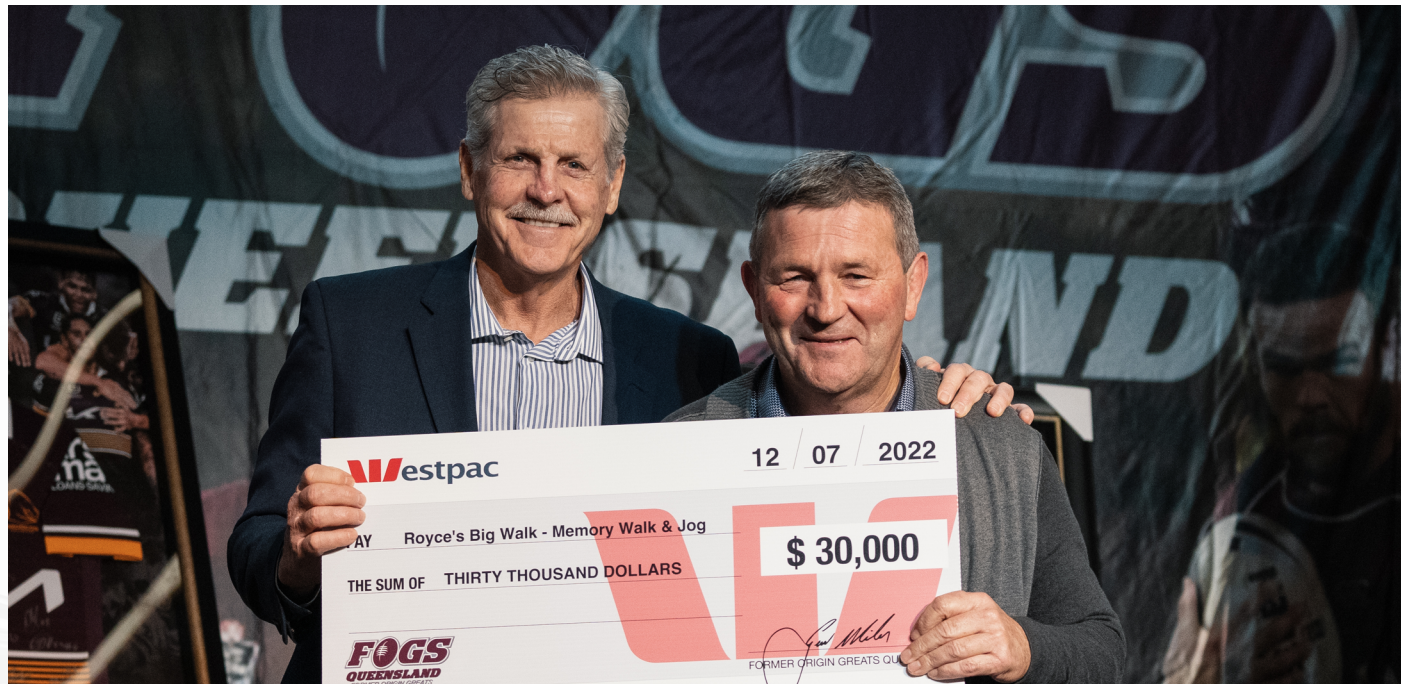
“The skills of the players are getting better each year, and we are really able to see the benefits of girls being able to play from the age of 12 all the way through now.”

Norris said this season was unprecedented with its hectic schedule. There were two NRLW competitions, plus a World Cup on top of the girls' club commitments.

Next year, the women's State of Origin will be expanded beyond just the one game.

"It has been a massive year for the girls, but hopefully we can get them fresh for next year," Norris said.





Pictures: Courtesy of NewsCorp/FOGS Media

BLUES LEGEND ROYCE

Grateful For His All Mates In Maroon

Royce Simmons is a NSW Blues legend, but he is eternally grateful for the support from his old Queensland Maroons rivals in his quest to assist dementia sufferers.

Earlier this year, the 62-year-old Penrith legend was diagnosed with younger onset Alzheimer's disease.

His first thought was to help others, and Simmons went on a fundraising walk for Dementia Australia to raise funds for their research foundation.

FOGS donated \$30,000 to the cause, and presented the 1991 grand final hero with a cheque at this year's FOGS Annual Charity Lunch.

In total, Royce's walk raised close to \$1 million.

"We did the walk from the little town of Goolagong where I live, and finished up in Penrith on a game night," Simmons said.

"I got great support from sponsors and my ex-footy mates to walk with me each of the 11 days. I had great support from everyone.

"We have already paid for two research programs with Dementia Australia, and we will pick another one shortly."

"There were heaps of blokes from NSW, but the Queenslanders were great. It is a big trip for them.

"I had guys like Wally Lewis, Gene Miles, Alfie Langer, Trevor Gillmeister and Martin Lang all walk with me and support the cause. I have so much respect for them."

Simmons said he was coping OK with his illness.

"I am on medication to slow things up. I do whatever they tell me to do - 200 per cent," he said.

"The walk was good to get awareness

out there. Dementia is the biggest killer of women in the world, and the second biggest killer of men.

"There is towards half a million people in Australia with dementia now. It has to be spoken about, and we have to encourage government to support research."

Simmons had a wonderful career.



lunch at Suncorp Stadium, Royce had the crowd roaring with laughter as he recalled a story of his Origin days going up against Queensland.

"Before the first Origin game in 1986, our coach Ron Willey pulled me aside and said 'I'd like you to be the vice-captain, but it won't be anything official'," Simmons recalled.

"I said: 'That's great. I'm very proud ... and I've been captain of Penrith for a long time, so I think I'll be able to do the job'."

Simmons then asked Willey what his role would entail.

"That's when he said that at the first scrum he wanted me to punch Greg Dowling in the head"

"I said: 'What do you think will happen then?'"

"He said: 'I don't think you'll hurt him. He'll go to punch you in the head, and while he is, I'll get Blocker (Steve Roach) to punch Dowling in the head'."

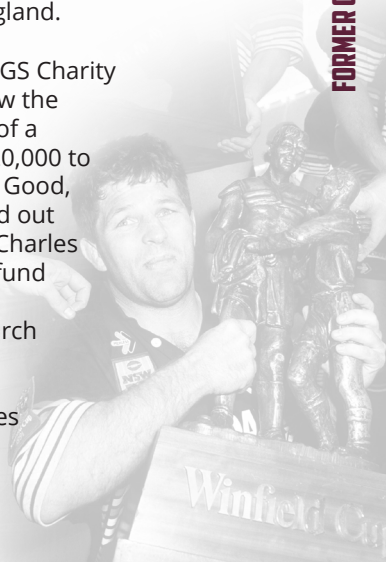
Simmons thought about it for a minute.

"Then I said to Ron: 'Have you ever thought about making Blocker vice-captain?'"

The story brought the house down.

Simmons went on tour with the Kangaroos later that year and became close mates with the Queensland brigade in England.

This year's FOGS Charity Lunch also saw the presentation of a cheque for \$20,000 to The Common Good, who are based out of the Prince Charles Hospital and fund life-changing medical research and projects focused on critical illnesses including dementia.



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Pictures: Courtesy of News Corp/FOGS Media

ONE-ON-ONE WITH GILLY

Fellas, We Need To Talk

Being away with the Kangaroos for eight weeks at the World Cup was a great experience for me.

While I expected to come home with a lot of good memories, I was not expecting to come home with a valuable lesson about life from Latrell Mitchell.

But that is exactly what I got one day in the team hotel when Latrell called out to me across the room and said: "Gilly, I love ya, you little bastard."

What struck me the most was not the fact that Latrell genuinely meant it, but how comfortable he was in expressing how he felt.

Talking openly about our feelings just wasn't the done thing back when we were playing, and the truth is I don't know if our generation has become any better at it over the years since.

It is definitely one area where the younger generation could teach the old blokes a thing or two.

The tragic loss of Paul Green earlier this year was the wake-up call we all needed to get better at talking to each other about how we are feeling.

Trying to work through things alone is not the answer.

After my cancer scare a couple of years ago, I have been chewing people's ears off about the need to get blood tests done every year.

By doing that, if anything out of the ordinary does happen, you are a good chance of catching it early and beating it before it gets out of control.

It is so important – and it is just the same when dealing with our mental health.

A regular catch-up with mates to share a yarn is like a check-up for your mental health.

We all know what playing in a team sport meant to us, and what it gives you.

And everyone knows that it is a big strain when you finally have to give that away and retire.

But what is about it that we miss the most?

For me, it wasn't about the playing and training, it was about being in the sheds after the game, having been through something together, feeling a part of something bigger than yourself, and sharing your experiences with your mates.

It was about going through the tough stuff together, and working together to

come out the other side.

The good news is, we can all still get that experience of being in the sheds after a game any time we want by catching up with mates for lunch and just having a chat, and seeing how each other is going.

The game may have changed from rugby league to the game of life, but the rewards are all the same – sharing your experiences with your mates, going through the tough stuff together, and working together to come out the other side.

It is what being a team is all about, and it is what mates are for.

While we will never get the same adrenaline rush as a game, being with some your mates you haven't seen for a while will definitely put a smile on your face – and feeling good about yourself is what it is all about.

But the first step is starting the conversation. And that is up to you.

The best mental health support lines are useless unless you take the first step of picking up the phone and making the call.

Your mates are there to help you. All you've got to do is ask.

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AGONY AMID THE ECSTASY

As Queensland Celebrated Origin Success, We Also Mourned The Loss Of Three Great Characters From Three Different Eras

IT was a bitter-sweet year for Queensland rugby league.

Amid the euphoria of the Maroons' Origin series triumph over the Blues, the Queensland rugby league fraternity also experienced devastation following the deaths of Barry Muir, Paul Green and Liam Hampson.

The trio were all lost during an eight-week period.

Former Queensland Origin coach and FOG No.113 Green died suddenly in August aged 49, while legendary halfback Muir passed away after a long battle with ill-health in September aged 84.

In October, rugby league was plunged into mourning again following the shock death of the 24-year-old Hampson, who tragically lost his life in Spain while holidaying overseas with his good mates, including FOG No.204, AJ Brimson.

Green's passing sent shockwaves through the rugby league world.

'Greeny' had a remarkable career, playing 162 first-grade games for Cronulla, the Cowboys, Roosters, Parramatta and the Broncos before enjoying remarkable success as a coach.

The Wynnum junior won back-to-back Queensland Cup premierships with his beloved Seagulls before delivering the Cowboys' first ever NRL title in 2015, breaking a 20-year title drought.



More than 700 guests attended Green's funeral at Wynnum's Kougari Oval to pay homage to a man who pursued success, achieved excellence, and left behind a catalogue of indelible memories.

"He won the first premiership for the Cowboys, and he will always be gold to the people of North Queensland," said Queensland Origin icon Wally Lewis.

"When we heard the news of Paul's passing, it was a shock to everyone.

"I am still gob smacked he is no longer with us.

He was one of the toughest, most tenacious players I saw.



"He is a man who will never be forgotten."

Green's long-time friend and former Broncos teammate, FOG No.89 Ben Ikin, paid tribute to his character.

"It was very devastating," Ikin said of Green's death.

"Paul will be remembered as a guy who thought deeply, who cared deeply and you felt that in his company.

"I always felt when Paul engaged in conversation, he cared about what you thought and said. And that part of his character enabled him to inspire a group of men at the Cowboys to their premiership in 2015.

"I will miss our chats. We used to say we would put the 'scuba gear' on and go deep with our conversations.

We lost a great friend and a great contributor to rugby league.

The Queensland league community will also miss the equally diminutive Muir.



Affectionately known as 'Garbo', Muir played 22 matches for Queensland, coached the state from 1974-78 and he was a key figure in cultivating NSW as the enemy, famously labelling Blues players 'cockroaches'.

The moniker stuck for NSW during the State of Origin era, and Muir loved nothing more than victory over the Blues.



The tough-as-nails halfback played 25 Tests for Australia, captaining his country twice, and touring Britain and France in 1959-60 and 1963-64.

Former Queensland five-eighth of the 1970s, Geoff Richardson, saw Muir just days before his passing.

"He was great for rugby league," Richardson said.

"Barry started the 'us against them' theme in Queensland rugby league. But he did not talk down to players. He urged them to have a go. He said to them 'you are good enough. You can do this'.

"We were taking on NSW teams with Bob Fulton and Artie Beetson. It was never easy, but Barry summed up the spirit of playing for Queensland."

A month after Muir's passing, Hampson was laid to rest at a public service at his favourite ground, Redcliffe's Dolphin Oval.



Just six weeks earlier, Hampson had played in the Queensland Cup grand final for Redcliffe and was on the NRL radar of Dolphins coach Wayne Bennett.

Hampson passed away after falling off a balcony at a nightclub in Barcelona.

"Liam was a wonderful young man," Redcliffe coach Scott Murray said.

"He was just fun to be around.

"I don't know how many times I walked into the training rooms ... you may have had a tough day but if Liam was in the room, everything was OK.

"He will certainly leave a big hole.

The Dolphins is a club with a rich history and his legacy will last here forever.





Pictures: Courtesy of NewsCorp

CTE: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The Story Every FOG Needs To Read

ONE of Australia's leading brain doctors has urged our Former Origin Greats members not to live in fear of potential head-trauma injuries beyond their playing careers.

Professor Michael Buckland, the expert who studied the brain of FOG No.113 Paul Green following his death in August, says there is no guarantee playing rugby league will lead to head-related disorders such as Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE).

A study of Green's brain following his tragic passing showed the 49-year-old was suffering CTE.

In recent months, Souths legend Mario Fenech, Penrith champion Royce Simmons and Parramatta great Ray Price all revealed they were battling dementia, while former Canterbury halfback Steve Mortimer was also diagnosed with the same brain condition last year.

Those developments have raised fears that every NRL player, past and present, is at risk of suffering brain damage.

But Buckland says athletes who participate in contact sports

should not be spooked into thinking they suffer, or will develop, CTE.

"We want people to be aware but we don't want to scare everyone into thinking they have this terrible disease," said Professor Buckland, a senior neuropathologist and the founder of the Australian Sports Brain Bank.

"Statistically, most athletes won't have CTE.

"As we all get older, you do forget things. But if you are an ex-footy player who played a lot and your wife is saying you are forgetting things, you might worry you have CTE. But it's a balancing act.

The scientific data from the US shows that in the case of American Football (NFL) players, between 10 to 20 per cent of them will end up with CTE.

"So one in 10 NFL players could get CTE. But whether or not that data is applicable to rugby league, we don't know yet.

"In the case of Paul Green, it was the head knocks he sustained in his football career which no doubt contributed to his CTE. But that's not to say it will happen to every rugby league player.

"From what we know so far, CTE only affects a minority of people that have been exposed to large numbers of head knocks."

Professor Buckland said symptoms of CTE often first showed as mood or behavioural issues.

"CTE is a degenerative brain disease, and it's not too dissimilar to Alzheimer's which is generally the most common degenerative brain disease," Buckland explained.

"There is a lot of concern among ex-players.

"At this stage, there is no diagnostic test that can determine CTE while you are alive - it's very much still in the realm of the autopsy diagnosis.



"The most common symptom of CTE is impulsivity. Sufferers will also show signs of anxiety, depression and explosivity.

"There seems to be two categories (of CTE) from our research.

"There's the disease that affects people in their 20s, 30s and 40s and that manifests itself as mental-health disorders such as depression, aggression, anxiety and irritability.

"If it occurs at a later age, say somebody in their 60s or 70s, it usually presents as difficulties in thinking, planning and memory."

Buckland says a healthy lifestyle and the support of a medical professional can greatly combat the threat of CTE.

It's pretty much as simple as this - avoid head knocks and you won't get CTE,

CTE is the only neurodegenerative disease we know that is completely preventable.

"If you have concerns, start with a good medical person - and as a starting point, that means a GP (general practitioner) and they can refer you to a brain specialist.

"I've had stories of people who were very depressed and it turned out they had chronic pain. Once they got their pain treated, their mood disorder went away.

"Other people thought they were getting demented, and it turned out they had sleep apnea.

"Once they got that treated, they could think so much better.

"So not every case is related to CTE, and if you treat underlying causes, your symptoms can go away.

"We know there are many things you can do to improve your brain health.

Even if you have been exposed to a large number of head knocks, it's vital to look after your general health.

"Watch your weight, make sure you exercise, control your blood sugars, control your alcohol, make sure you are socially and intellectually engaged ... all these sorts of things are really important for brain health."

For more information on brain donation visit:
www.brainbank.org.au



Pictures: Courtesy of RLWC2021/Getty Images

KANGARULE!

Mal's men grab World Cup glory to end remarkable season

Australia's win over underdogs Samoa in the Rugby League World Cup final added another title to the bulging trophy cabinet of Kangaroos coach Mal Meninga, and a fitting exclamation point to a remarkable year of football.

As expected, the Kangaroos cruised through the early rounds of the competition, produced the necessary grit and class when needed to defeat New Zealand in the semi-final, then proved far too strong for the Samoans in the final, winning 30-10.

In a spectacular day for the Australians at Old Trafford, the Jillaroos were also celebrating their success after crushing New Zealand 54-4 in the Women's World Cup Final.

Veteran Queenslander Ali Briginshaw was at her sublime best, pulling the strings for the Aussies and winning her second consecutive medal for being player of the match in the World Cup final, after being named best on ground in the 2017 final as well.

The winners of all three World Cups – men's, women's and Wheelchair World Cup winners England – were all presented their trophies at the same time, in an historic moment for the sport.

While Australia success at the World Cup would hardly classify as a shock, the tournament was a tremendous success in proving how far the international game has progressed in recent times.

Samoa's elevation to an international powerhouse by making the final against Australia was the most notable example, recovering from a heavy defeat in the first round to become just the sixth nation in World Cup history to make the final, and the first 'tier two' nation to make the decider.

Despite missing the final after losing their semi to Samoa, England have improved in leaps and bounds with the injection of more players with NRL experience, and are now clearly capable of taking on the Kangaroos and Kiwis.

Tonga remain a force despite their disappointing early exit, while the likes of Fiji, Lebanon, PNG and France continue improving to create a genuine international competition, as newcomers Jamaica, Greece and Italy expand the game's geographical footprint.

Fittingly, it is the game's heartland here in Queensland that is helping to drive that growth internationally.

Remarkably, there were 21 current or former Maroons spread across five different national squads in the men's World Cup, all flying the flag for the FOGS.

Australia naturally led the way with 11 Queenslanders in the Kangaroos squad, with Pat Carrigan, Lindsay Collins, Reuben Cotter, Tino Fa'asuamaleaui, Harry Grant, Jeremiah Nanai and Murray Taulagi all wearing the green and gold for the first time.

Samoa and Tonga's squad featured four Maroons in each, while Queenslanders Xavier Coates (PNG) and Dylan Napa (Cook Islands) also represented their country of heritage.



Australia clinching the Cup was the coup de grace on a remarkable year, that officially got underway nine months earlier with the first pre-season trials and All-Star matches in February.

In the NRL, Penrith joined elite company as back-to-back premiers with a crushing 28-12 win over Parramatta. Panthers fullback Dylan Edwards was named the Clive Churchill Medal winner.

Newcastle won their first NRLW premiership with a 32-12 win over the Eels, with Queenslander Tamika Upton winning the Karyn Murphy Medal for a best-on-ground performance at fullback for the Knights.

In the Hostplus Cup, Norths Devils also went back-to-back, with two tries to Brayden McGrady and a man-of-the-match performance from Duncan Hall Medallist Jacob Gagan handing the men in blue, gold and blue a 16-10 win over Redcliffe.



FOGS AT THE WORLD CUP

Pat Carrigan
FOG #224
Daly-Cherry Evans
FOG #176
Lindsay Collins
FOG #210
Reuben Cotter
FOG #223
Tino Fa'asuamaleaui
FOG #209
Harry Grant
FOG #217
Valentine Holmes
FOG #188
Ben Hunt
FOG #193
Cameron Munster
FOG #192
Jeremiah Nanai
FOG #225
Murray Taulagi
FOG #226



AUSTRALIA

Dylan Napa
FOG #187
COOK ISLANDS



Xavier Coates
FOG #205
PAPUA NEW GUINEA



Anthony Milford
FOG #186
Josh Papalii
FOG #177
Jaydn Su'a
FOG #211
Hamiso Tabuai-Fidow
FOG #220
SAMOA



David Fifita
FOG #200
Moeaki Fotuauika
FOG #213
Felise Kaufusi
FOG #195
Joe Ofahengaue
FOG #199



TONGA



Pictures: Courtesy of FOGS Media

ANOTHER 'WHEELIE' SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIP

For the ARTIE Academy

The FOGS ARTIE Academy continues to provide innovative programs to Indigenous communities, and the partnership with Sporting Wheelies is proving to be a winner.

The partnership is helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students understand what it is like to live with a disability, and the federally funded programs that are run take inclusive sports into communities that ordinarily do not have access to them.

Sporting Wheelies Health and Fitness Manager Jacqueline Kelly said that due to the strengths of both organisations, working together with the FOGS ARTIE Academy is a match made in heaven.

"Sporting Wheelies are experts in delivering education around inclusive sports with disabilities," Kelly said. "ARTIE is so well connected, and are the experts in delivering the programs to engage in Indigenous children.

"Our staff deliver the program through 'game changers', who are people living with a disability."

"They work closely with the ARTIE coordinators to make sure we are running programs that are going to engage kids in each community."

The relationship between the game changers and the ARTIE staff has worked well.

Sporting Wheelies also engage and train staff, along with community members that work with young people, to give them the skills to run the inclusive sports programs themselves.

This is enhanced by communities being provided with modified inclusive sports kits.

FOGS ARTIE Academy General Manager Steven Page said Sporting Wheelies delivers some of their programs to remote and Indigenous communities after partnering with the ARTIE Academy.



"They went out to eight schools in our program and delivered their inclusive sport and education to our students," Page said.

"The kids got the opportunity to see what is like to live in a wheelchair or with a disability."

"They played goal ball, which is an inclusive sport for the blind. We found that it got our students to understand what people in their class with a disability or in a wheelchair were dealing with day to day."

Page said the programs were integral to helping students grow their understanding and awareness.

"It is the small things," he said. "It might be the cracks in the footpaths, or when drinking fountains are too low for people in a wheelchair.



"We have quite a few students across the state who are in a wheelchair and they got to be involved. Now they fit in more."

The program has been delivered into Marsden State School, Marsden State High, Ayr State High, Ingham State High, Mareeba State School, Mareeba

State High and also Yarrabah State School, even though it is not part of the ARTIE Academy.

"It was so inclusive and engaging for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students as well," Page said.

"The schools wanted to offer the program to every student in the school, so all students can appreciate the challenges people with a disability face.

"We did this program with the ARTIE kids, and also with other students in PE classes. Sporting Wheelies are going to send out activity kits to those schools in the partnership so they can continue to deliver different aspects of the program."

SPORTING WHEELIES AD



Pictures: Courtesy of FOGS Media

TRANSURBAN ARTIE #1 DRIVING SCHOOL

Transurban Drives ARTIE Driving School To No.1

The FOGS ARTIE Academy now has its own driving school, meaning students can go from learning to drive through to gaining their licence all within the ARTIE program they know and trust.

Known as the Transurban ARTIE No.1 Driving School, FOGS General Manager Steven Page said it had been a huge success because of the ARTIE Academy's brilliant reputation and record of success.

"The brand of ARTIE is so recognisable throughout our schools and that gives the students confidence," Page said.

"Transurban are our partners, and the No.1 is based on FOG No.1, Arthur Beetson, and it is the first of its kind," Page said.

"We have had our Driver Licensing Program for quite a while, where we provide our students with support to get their learner's permit.

"Then we give them five driving lessons with a qualified instructor, support to get their 100 hours, and then we give them their licence.

"We have always said it would be ideal to have our own driving school so then we can support students in our schools from zero hours to 100. When Transurban came on board, we were able to take that next step."

The school has a qualified driving instructor, Mike Southey, on board and his sole job is to go out with the students and provide the required hours.

"Every hour that he does with a student is worth triple the time," Page said.

"Because he is a driving instructor, one hour is worth three to their logbook hours.

Now we can use funds that we receive into our driving school to provide more opportunity for our students.

"Mike has been a driving instructor for more than 20 years, and due to our relationship with our schools, we are allowed to find out when our students are available during school time and he can do it throughout the day.

"He is available exclusively for the schools throughout southeast Queensland."

Students have embraced doing driving lessons with the ARTIE program.

"It gives them confidence because they know they are a part of us and trust us," Page said.

"Mike will go in and talk to the kids in the schools, so he is a part of our program and builds those relationships before he does the lessons."



Transurban



Putting students in the Driver's seat

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Pictures: Courtesy of FOGS Media



While student attendance in primary schools has always been higher than in high schools, it is the extra support the ARTIE Academy provide within the classroom that is so crucial.

"That is where our tutors do have such a valuable role, because it is the extra support the students get that they may not get in a class where a teacher has a lot of students," Page said.

"That assistance is both with behaviour and working with students academically one-on-one."

The renewal of the funding was provided due to the results the program had achieved in the previous three years, as recognised by Minister for Education, Grace Grace.

“ARTIE assists to Close the Gap in educational outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students”

Ms Grace said.

"It provides opportunity to participate in programs that encourage improvements in school attendance, behaviour, academic achievement, effort, and ultimately Year 12 attainment or its equivalent."



FOUR MORE YEARS!

Queensland Government Continues To Back ARTIE Primary Program

The future of the ARTIE Academy in the state's primary schools is assured for the next four years after a \$5.6 million investment by the Queensland Government.

The re-funding of the program will ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are embraced by the ARTIE Academy ethos from a young age – improving school attendance and education outcomes and assisting children to identify with their culture.

The ARTIE Academy has been funded in high schools federally since 2010, but it was not until 2019 that the Queensland Government provided funding for FOGS and the

ARTIE Academy primary school program.

"That was when we picked up the 19 primary schools that we are now operating in," FOGS ARTIE Academy General Manager Steven Page said.

"We had a three-year contract initially, and halfway through this year, we were rewarded by the Queensland Government with a further four years to continue through to the end of 2025."

The program provides upwards of 2000 students within ARTIE Academy primary schools with the extra support that they need right from prep.

“We are seeing more students identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander within those schools”

"They want to be a part of our ARTIE Academy, and wear our shirts with pride as well. The engagement has helped students identify with their culture at an earlier age and to embrace it."



Pictures: Courtesy of FOGS Media

ARTIE ACADEMY TUTORS

More than 300 volunteer tutors are back in schools providing vital one-on-one assistance to students with the FOGS ARTIE Academy throughout south-east Queensland.

Those tutors provide 10,000 hours of assistance each year to students, a return to pre-COVID numbers.

ARTIE Academy General Manager Steven Page said while there were education coordinators placed in schools, the tutors also played a critical role.

"The tutors are additional support for our single coordinator, who may be looking after 100 kids," Page said. "A school may have 20 tutors providing support, and that just amplifies the support we give to the schools and students."

"Some of our students may be behind, but they have a tutor sitting side-by-side and helping them throughout the day."

During COVID, obtaining volunteers was tough. Last year, it was good to see them back.

"But this year we have finally hit more than 300 volunteer tutors working with our students in South-East Queensland, which is the most we have had for quite a long time."

The volunteer tutors nominate whether they would like to work in a high school or a primary school, and the ARTIE Academy directs them to the area where they can be of most benefit.

South-East Queensland Program Manager Hayley Moloney said that this approach resulted in the best use of resources.

"The school then works with that tutor around what areas they are comfortable supporting the students," Moloney said.

"Essentially, they can be assisting students all the way from prep through to Year 12."

The tutors become a friendly and reliable face for the students to look up to as they earn their trust.

"Our volunteer tutors are positive role models, and they make the world of difference for the students, sometimes just through providing that little bit of extra motivation," Moloney said.

"Once they have that down pat, then there is the next step of helping the students academically."

"This has been one of our most successful years in recent times, with volunteers being able to come back into schools. It is good that we have really been able to return to some normality for the kids."



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Pictures: Courtesy of FOGS Media

CONNECTION WITH STUDENTS

A Ridgely-Didge Success Story

Fostering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and community engagement is a key mission of the FOGS ARTIE Academy – and the many success stories prove that approach works with students.

The ARTIE Academy bases much of its work around Indigenous education and encouraging children to come to school by setting goals for students at risk and rewarding those that succeed

But ARTIE Academy General Manager Steven Page explained that there is more to it than that.

“Just having a conversation with a student that they need to come to school for ‘x’, ‘y’ or ‘z’ reason can sometimes not be the right hook for a particular student,” Page said.

“Dangling a hoodie as a carrot and saying, ‘At the end of term, if you keep coming to school, you’ll get a hoodie’ doesn’t work for everyone.

“We have found that connecting our students to culture and something they believe in can also engage them, while aligning with all of our values.”

ARTIE Academy Education Coordinator Junior Sims established a Didgeridoo Club at Eagleby South State School in

Term 2 this year, which has been a huge hit with students.

“I had established a men’s group for kids that were coming to school, which gave them a safe space to talk and share their business, and I had some kids who had some challenges,” Sims said.

The Didgeridoo Club was definitely a benefit for both parties.

“Some of the kids didn’t understand their own culture, so the club was all about how to play the ‘didge’, and how to paint the artwork that goes with it.

“It was just about helping them have a sense of belonging so they can teach their kids one day, and pass it on to the next generation. Now they know how to play a didge, and how to design and paint one.”

Page said the Didgeridoo Club had proven to be a great motivator “to get students to come to school and be proud of something”.

“That was a successful pilot program we will look to roll out at other schools,” he said.

A skateboard art piece project has fulfilled the same function.

Ten students from Years 5-6 at Inala State School designed and painted their own skateboards, and discussed career pathways and academic goals at the same time.

“They had different focuses during the week, such as explaining what they thought were the strengths of the other students and listening to our staff who told their own stories with a career pathway theme,” Page said.

“We also got high school students from Glenala (State High) to come down and tell them their stories to assist with leadership and that transition into high school.



The students have now designed the skateboards, and will present them to the school when they finish in Year 6.

The ARTIE Reconciliation Award is another initiative which has acknowledged the leaders in the community in a wide range of spheres

“We got students during Reconciliation Week to nominate people within their school or community – Indigenous or non-Indigenous – that stood up for the theme of reconciliation this year of ‘be brave,’” Page said.

“There was a voting system and panel with one person from each school presented with the award.”

Aunty Deb Nagas, the Community Education Counsellor at Deception Bay State High, is a prime example of how much the award means.

“She is amazing, and has been part of the (ARTIE) program since we started it there five years ago,” Page said.

“She is retiring at the end of the year, and when the school presented her with the award, she was in tears.”

An extraordinary piece of artwork located in the FOGS head office and designed by ARTIE Academy Education Coordinator Shani Mustey is the ultimate in community engagement.

“Shani came to me with an idea around setting up an area where the ARTIE coordinators could chill out,” Page explained.

“She designed the first part of the mural, and then asked the other staff for input. The mural has Arthur Beetson in the middle and tells the story and journey of the ARTIE Academy and FOGS, and all the milestones along the way.

“It features a rainbow serpent that we are getting the Queensland Origin players and the people who are part of the program in some way to put their thumb print on.

“Arthur Beetson’s sons were the first to put their thumb prints on, and the next was Colin Scott, FOG No.2. We will get that added to along the way.”

The ARTIE Academy also knows how to feed the masses.

It has become famous for its community barbecues around Queensland where parents, teachers and students all get to mix in a safe environment.

“I think we have cooked 20,000 sausages this year,” Page grinned.



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Pictures: Courtesy of FOGS Media

DRIVER LICENSING PROGRAM

Hits Top Gear With New Funding

The re-funding of the FOGS ARTIE Academy Driver's Licence Program is set to see more than 500 students receive assistance to get on the road to success through until the end of 2026.

The \$1.125 million from the Queensland Government to FOGS will support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at eight secondary schools across the state, including as far north as Ingham and Mareeba.

The Driver Licensing Program started in 2017 as a research program in conjunction with QUT. Following that research, RACQ came on board and have funded the program and supported it ever since.

"They have donated eight cars into our schools now, which are then used in the volunteer program to help with the 100 hours," FOGS ARTIE Academy General Manager Steven Page said.

"Then last year, we did a pilot program with the Queensland Department of Transport where they gave us one year of funding to run the full program across our high schools in 2021.

"At the start of this year, we were rewarded with an upgraded contract until the end of 2026 which will see upwards of 500 students be a part of it over that period

Now we have the complete package we can provide our students.

Students who achieve their attendance and academic goals and become a part of the program get their learner's permit and five driving lessons with a designated driving school.

"They are a part of our mentor driver program, which gets them into an RACQ car with a qualified driving instructor or volunteer mentor that helps them get up their required hours," Page said.

We provide them with a test package at the end, where they do a lesson before they borrow our car and go for their licence. Then we pay for one year of their driver's licence at the end.

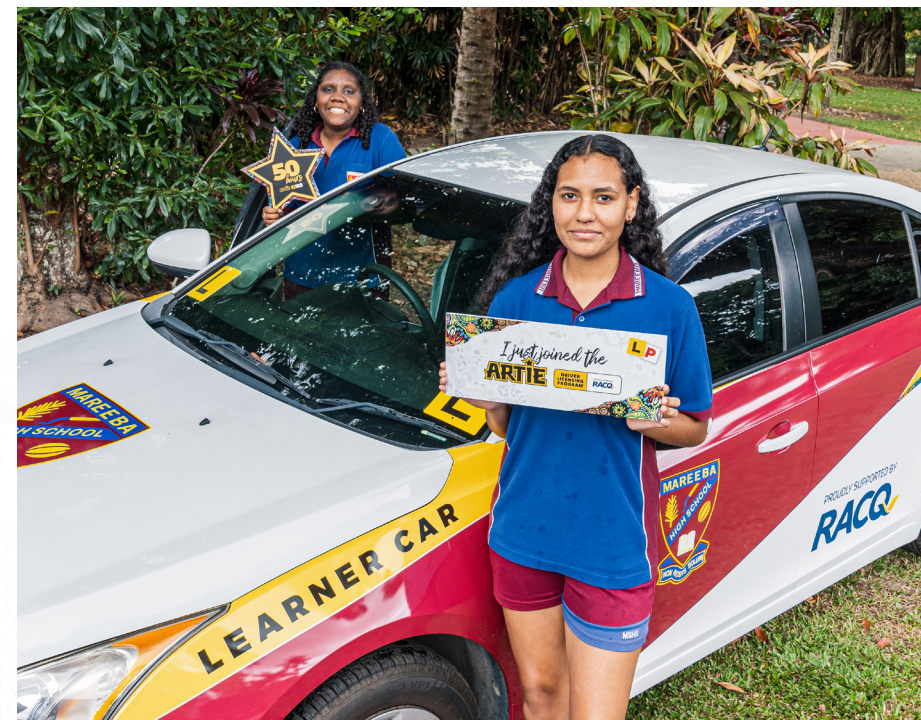
"For each student, that represents a saving of \$1500 – so long as they continue to come to school and have good attendance, behaviour and effort within their academic work as well.



The program is run by Driver's Licence Program Manager Rebeckah Mooney, who said the State Government funding was a huge boost to the services that could now be provided.

"We have a five-year plan now, which allows us to solidify what the students are able to access through the program," she said.

It really gives us a chance to be thinking a few years ahead and how we can better support the program to assist the students to get their licence.



"The funding enables us to also focus on the mentor aspect of things, so we are able to give as much access to the learner driver mentor program as possible to the students.

"The funding announcement also means that more students and families are noticing that we do have the program, and want to be involved. We are now able to focus on more schools and students."



Pictures: Courtesy of FOGS Media

JUNIOR RELISHES RISE

From Student To ARTIE Leader

Look no further than 19-year-old ARTIE Academy Education Coordinator Junior Sims to discover how inspiring the program is.

Sims is one of six ARTIE alumni now working for the Academy program.

Last year he was Indigenous Captain of Marsden State High, and a pupil of the ARTIE Academy.

Now he oversees the program at Eagleby South State School, Eagleby State School and Berrinba East State School.

"That is one of my big achievements here at the ARTIE Academy," Sims said. "I didn't think I was going to have one school, but they have trusted me to have three schools of my own and I am so grateful.

"The ARTIE Academy helped me get my driver's licence and my driving hours up when I was in my senior years. In my junior years, they helped me with my schoolwork.

"I had tutors in my classroom, and they were constantly asking me questions and holding me accountable for my work and setting goals. That made me realise the future was in my hands.

The support they gave me to do that is what motivates me to be here every day. It makes me want to do the same for our people and the next generation, so they can come to school and graduate.

FOGS ARTIE Academy General Manager Steven Page said Sims was given an opportunity at the end of last year after graduating.

"Junior did such a great job that we offered him a job with us straight away," Page said.

We are going to look at providing a job at the end of Year 12 for one student to work with us again the next year.



"We are now seeing a lot of our former students apply for roles within the program. They want to give back after they received great support when they were at school from the ARTIE Academy."

Tahnee Rogers, Talhia Cohen, Georgia Clark, Rowland Williams, and Grace Rudken are five other ARTIE alumni now working as Education Coordinators.

Rudken attended Atherton State High, and is now working at Atherton State School. Rogers was a student at Bundamba State Secondary College and is now based out of Morayfield State High and Bribie Island State School.

"Tahlia Cohen previously attended Marsden State High School, where she was the first Indigenous captain of the school. Her sisters are still part of the program," Page said.



"She was our Bond University Scholarship holder, and did a law degree. She has come to work with us because she wanted to do something like this before she goes into law practice.

"She works at Bundamba State School, Ipswich East State School and Morayfield State School."

Sims is a great example of how valuable the ARTIE Academy is.

"I am really enjoying it," he said.

"The kids show me respect, and I show the same to them. To do it for the next generation is so good."





Pictures: Courtesy of NewsCorp

ANDREW'S PEACHY KEEN

About Impact of the ARTIE Academy

Talk about a peach of a contribution.

The ARTIE Academy depends on the support of the leaders at the 35 schools throughout Queensland where it operates, and former Bundamba State Secondary College and Marsden High State High Principal Andrew Peach has been – and continues to be – a wonderful support.

Peach has been an integral part of the ARTIE Academy since its inception in 2010, and is still the Chair of the Indigenous Advisory Committee for the Academy.

FOGS ARTIE Academy General Manager Steven Page said Peach was a true believer in the Academy and its work.

"The time and effort Andrew puts into our program and every one of the students is incredible, and something above and beyond anything I have seen from a principal," Page said.

He is the program's biggest advocate, and believes in what we do.

"Marsden and Bundamba high schools, where Andrew worked, were the first schools to be part of the ARTIE Academy, so he has led the way and supported this program since Day 1."

Peach said "the focus on the kids" had been the great strength of the ARTIE Academy.

"All the way through my engagement and involvement with the ARTIE Academy, the over-arching focus of the program and the great people who work for it has been about what they can do to help the kids," Peach said.

Peach said that he had seen first-hand how the ARTIE Academy responded to the needs of children, with the Driver Licensing Program as just one example.

"If there is a problem or a need, then the solutions-focus of the team has been amazing," he said.

"We've seen that with the driving program that has evolved over the years. The kids weren't able to get their hours up to get a licence, which impacted their ability to get to university or jobs.

"So instead of sitting back, the guys at FOGS found the solution with their cars in schools, the driving academy and lessons. The program genuinely makes a difference to kids and their families."

Peach has taken a break from teaching, and is now NRL General Manager

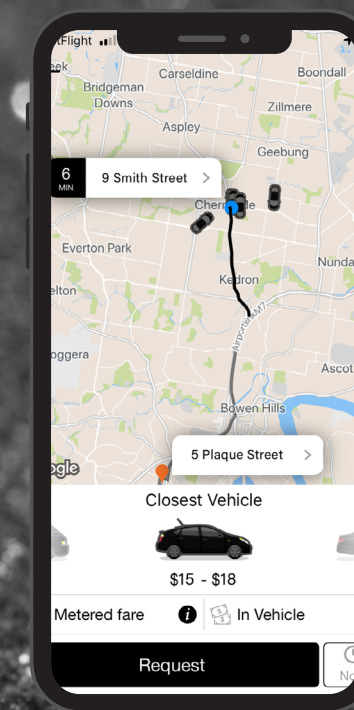
of School Participation. The FOGS organisation and its focus remains dear to his heart.

"It is a unique model which comes from the sporting heroes at the FOGS who want to give back to the kids, and they have never lost sight of that," he said.

As Queenslanders, we all love the State of Origin side and Artie Beetson as well. It has been an honour and privilege to see Artie's legacy live on across the state through the Academy.



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Pictures: Courtesy of NewsCorp

BENNY SAYS DOLPHINS ARE READY

For Shock And War

WAYNE Bennett insists the Dolphins will not be whipping boys in their debut season as the super coach prepares to launch a bold new era for the NRL and Queensland rugby league.

Bennett will pen another chapter in his remarkable 45-year coaching career as the foundation coach of the Dolphins, who will take the field as the NRL's 17th club for the 2023 premiership.

It is the code's first expansionary move since the birth of the Gold Coast Titans in 2007 and, almost two decades later, the NRL is banking on the mastery of Bennett to ensure the Dolphins are competitive from Day 1.

It will be a big ask.

Even Bennett himself concedes the task of recruiting 30 full-time players with a 12-month runway has been a challenge, with the Dolphins failing to snare a number of big-name targets for their historic campaign.

Queensland Origin stars Cameron Munster, Harry Grant, Kalyn Ponga

and Tino Fa'asuamaleaui are just some of the marquee players who knocked back the opportunity to spearhead the Dolphins' entry to the big league.

Since winning the NRL's expansion licence on October 13, 2021, the Dolphins have copped their fair share of brickbats.

They've been labelled 'Dad's Army' and favourites for the wooden spoon, but seven-time premiership-winning legend Bennett is adamant the Dolphins will hold their own next season.

"I don't fear us not being competitive. We won't be easy beats," Bennett said.

"It's vital we are competitive from Day 1, and I am confident we will be."

"No-one will want to see a new club getting flogged by 30 or 40 points. That won't be good for anybody in the NRL.

"I am aware of that.

"We've got no dispensation, no special allowances from the NRL. But we knew the rules, and I will make sure we are ready to go in Round 1 next year."

"I am not hitting the panic button.

"We just have to find a way to be competitive. I know the type of player I am trying to get and I know if I get those players, we will handle ourselves well from Day 1."



While some big names have stayed loyal to their existing clubs, Bennett has managed to secure some premiership-winning quality that will form the bedrock of the Dolphins in their embryonic years.

Melbourne veteran and FOG No.195 Felise Kaufusi was the club's first official signing, and the Queensland Origin backrower will be joined by Storm teammates Kenny and Jesse Bromwich.

That gives the Dolphins three premiership winners, established representative stars and crucial experience in their forward pack as they look to muscle up against the NRL's best sides.

Throw in Souths grand-final prop Mark Nicholls, Eels workhorse Ray Stone and Cowboys Origin firebrand Tom Gilbert, and the Dolphins will have forwards more than capable of competing in the middle third.

The backline lacks true star power. But the recruitment of former Broncos grand-final pivot Anthony Milford (FOG No.186) and Cowboys speed machine Hamiso Tabuai-Fidow (FOG No.220) will give the Dolphins some attacking options.

"I just want a group of men that are always doing their best for the club," Bennett said.

"There was a general in the First World War who said: 'I would rather go to war with 100 men who will fight to the death than 1000 who won't'.

"That's my philosophy as a coach.

"Some guys may not have as much ability. But if they compete and always give their best, you give yourself a chance."

The man who drove NRL expansion, ARL Commission boss Peter V'landys, backed Bennett to get the Dolphins firing in 2023.

"I have zero concerns about the Dolphins," he said.

"I have the utmost confidence in Wayne Bennett, who I think is one of the greatest assets the game has.

"If any man can bring success to the Dolphins, it's him, and I also have confidence in the management of the club.

"Wayne Bennett is a genius. We made the right call on expansion, and he will prove everyone wrong ... the Dolphins will shock a lot of people next year."



Pictures: Courtesy of NewsCorp

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Slammin' Sam Is Still Giving His All To The Greater Cause

Sam Backo is a great Queenslander who is giving back to the state that gave him so much.

The 61-year-old was one of Queensland's most fearsome props in the late 1980s State of Origin arena and his legacy lives on.

Backo is giving back to the north Queensland community that he emerged from to play for the Maroons.

"I work up at Kuranda for a mob called TRACQS (through Services Australia), who run a community development program that I co-ordinate up at the jail," Backo said.

"I am helping out my mob. I assist people when they come out of jail and hook them up to a job network.

"The Indigenous population is over-represented in the jails as you know. I help get them off the merry-go-round."

Backo was an integral member of the Maroons side in the late 1980s which re-established Queensland's dominance in the Origin cauldron.

In 1988, Backo became the first prop to win consecutive man of the match awards in Origin.

He was honoured in the Maroons' wins in Origin II and III of the 3-0 series win.

Backo played seven games for Queensland and lost just one.

In Game Two of the 1988 series, Backo held the fort when captain Wally Lewis was controversially sin-binned.



Cans of XXXX rained down onto the field from an angry crowd.

"I really couldn't believe it when the cans started flying," Backo chuckled.

Wally was the golden-haired boy.

"I enjoyed playing with all of the players I played with at all levels. But when I played for Queensland, it was for my state and my mates."



Backo said he enjoyed playing for coach Wayne Bennett at Canberra and Brisbane.

It was more than just footy for Backo. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players have been embraced by the Maroons and it is no wonder.

Arthur Beetson set the ball rolling and ever since Indigenous footballers have been integral to Queensland's success.

"I played for my family, and my pop. He was my dad and the one that raised me. I never met my (real) dad," Backo said.

I was playing for my mob and for all blackfellas. We came through the struggle and we stood up and were counted.

"I am proud to be a north Queensland rainforest Murri."

He had a standout season in 1987 for the Raiders where the club reached its first grand final, before losing to Manly

"The mayor of Canberra was the No.1 Raiders supporter, but they made the mistake of having a motorcade around the city before the grand final," he recalled.

My psychology told me that the job hadn't been done. You'd think we'd have won before the game had kicked off.

SAM BACKO

FOG No.56

Clubs:
Valleys, Canberra, Leeds, Broncos

Queensland:
7 Origins (1988-90)

Australia:
6 Tests (1988-89)

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