

Get REDDY Australia: When Rugby is the Real Deal!

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Respect, reconnection and renewal might just lead to an Australian Rugby Renaissance. After several years of discipline and hard work, the Queensland Reds have undergone a resurgence establishing themselves as a Club that prides itself on policy and play, and one that is powered by people and principle. It's a format that's yielding results, on and off the field.

It's no secret that Rugby in Australia has struggled over recent years, particularly in terms of its public image, support base, and its ability to dominate on the international stage.

However, the recent transformation of the Queensland Reds is proving that strength and success stem from prioritizing the core values of sport and community.

Queensland Rugby Union was officially formed in 1893 and the Reds evolved from the Queensland Team. More than a Club, it remains the State team. It encompasses a rich and distinguished history and has produced some of Australia's finest players, including Mark Loane, Paul McLean, Michael Lynagh, Tim Horan, Toutai Kefu and John Eales.

There have been many milestones over the years, though the 1970s and 1980s are often reflected upon as something of a golden era. Indeed, during this time Queensland became the most successful provincial Rugby side in the World.

However, over the past decade results had been wanting, the Club environment appeared far from ideal and public support was wearing thin.

QRU decided it was time for a new direction. Thus, in October 2017, the Club took something of a leap of faith by installing Brad Thorn as Head Coach. Brad is an individual who has triumphed nationally and internationally in the worlds of Rugby League and Rugby Union – a supreme player, with an unrivalled, combined-code record. Yet, he was relatively inexperienced in the world of coaching. It was a bold move, though not an injudicious one.

Brad has always been something of an exception. He's a man who doesn't embark upon anything without absolute commitment, tenacity, discipline and faith. He knows too, about winning. But it's not the trophy, or the adulation he seeks, rather the journey and the concomitant growth of reward hard-won.

Since Brad's placement, the Club has experienced a new lease of life, winning Australia's Super Rugby AU 2021 Championship. It was a highlight for Australian Rugby. The game was played in front of 42,000 people at Suncorp Stadium, Brisbane, resulting in a 19-16 Reds victory over the ACT Brumbies.

However, the Club is well aware that 2022 presents a tougher competition. The impact of the coronavirus saw the Super Rugby reformatted to 3 domestic competitions in 2021. This year brings with it the excitement and challenges of facing the gold-standard test of the New Zealand Teams once again, as well as participating in the inaugural 2022 Super Rugby Pacific competition.

In many ways, Queensland is becoming the national hub of elite sport. In particular, Brisbane's successful bid for the 2032 Olympics has put the State in the sporting limelight.

Sport is significant at a personal, communal and national level. There are obvious physical and psychological benefits. There is also the importance of teamwork and social interaction and the meaning that comes from having a common ground. Certainly, the coronavirus pandemic has magnified the need for communities to retain the basic bonds of humanity and symbols of unity. Sport is without question a powerful means of doing this.

Moreover, it's a powerful tool in life – but the power is not to be found in the winning, it's within the inner linings – the inspiration, the dedication, the camaraderie, the sense of achievement and purpose that comes from having goals and overwhelmingly, from the fire of passion that erupts when individuals and communities feel a sense of identity and belonging.

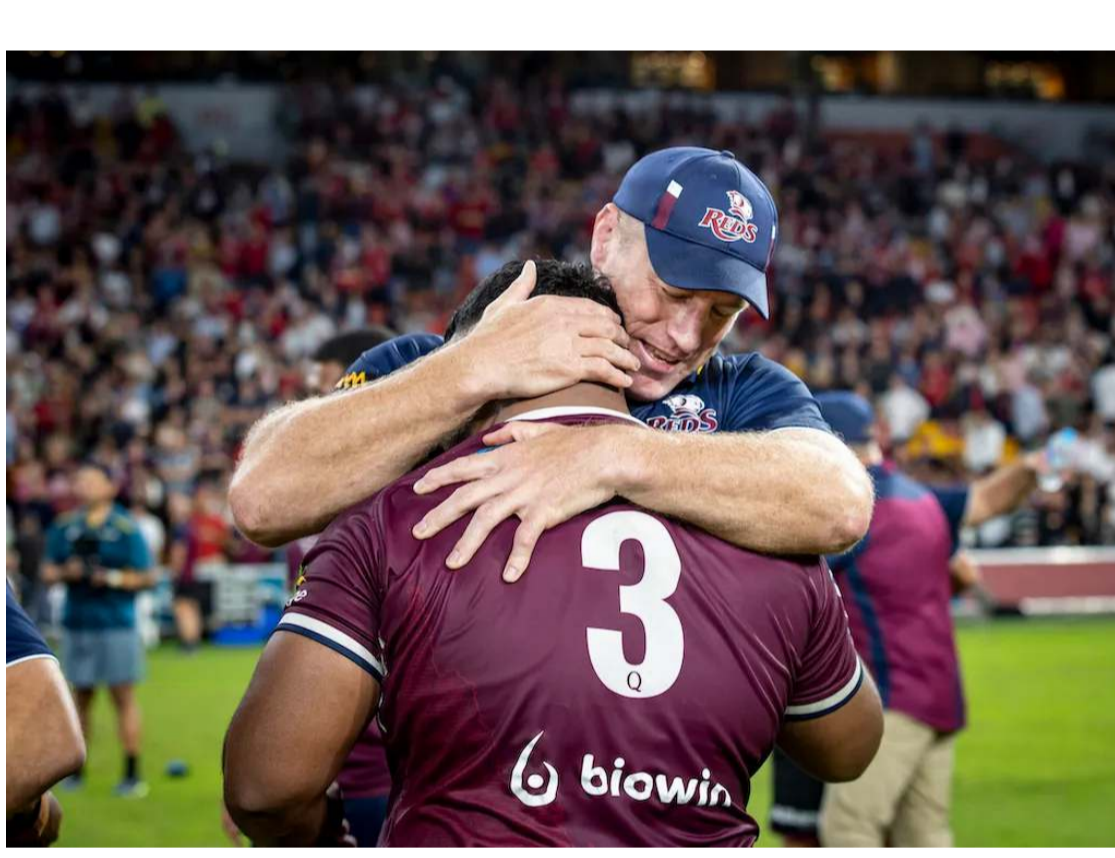
In a world where sport sometimes offers a disappointing disparity between declaratory and actual policy, when too often the right words are spoken, but infrequently backed up, the Reds are defining themselves as a Club that is the *real deal*, a Club prepared to build upon character and culture as the pillars of development and success.

It would be remiss, however, to suppose that winning is not a priority. Indeed, it's very much at the centre of the Club's vision. Brad Thorn is also an innately competitive individual. Yet, it's not about winning at all costs, rather it's about winning the right way. It's about a culture based on what Thorn describes as "care".

Thus, who is Brad Thorn and why is Queensland Rugby generating renewed excitement and support for the Game at a grassroots and professional level?

Brad has an impeccable, athlete history. He played 460 professional games over 21 seasons and two codes, earning 17 major trophies, including NRL Titles, Super League, State of Origin, Tri-Nations, Bledisloe Cup, Rugby World Cup and Heineken Cup. He represented Australia eight times in Rugby League as well as 59 caps in Rugby Union for the New Zealand All Blacks. There is arguably no other player who can equal Brad's stunning, dual-international achievements. Furthermore, his longevity and match fitness as a player was exceptional. When he retired at the age of 40, by his own admission, he still felt "pretty good" – a remarkable feat, given the striking physicality of League and Union.

Brad remains a fit and physically imposing man today, with a calm and steadfast demeanor. He is courteous, humble and strong-minded. There is something of fierce tranquillity about him, as though sailing on still waters but one who relishes the challenges of the storm.



Born in Otago, New Zealand, he remembers "loving growing up with my brother and my Mum and Dad and loving playing Rugby". He has very fond memories of "living up near Queenstown, in the mountains and just how beautiful it was". Brad was nine when his family moved to Brisbane and says that "Brisbane's always been my home. New Zealand's where I'm from but Brisbane's my home". After an enviable professional career that enabled him to travel the world, he embraced the opportunity to return to Brisbane and to work for the Reds. Not only did he hold a particular affinity for QLD Rugby, but he understood the significance of its history, the glory days when the Club was world revered.

There is a beautiful simplicity to many things at their best. Consider the genius and genesis of the Harrier Jet that evolved from what was in essence, a simple aeronautical, engineering design – to an undiscovered and brilliant one.

Similarly, one of the traits often demonstrated by highly successful sports individuals and teams is a determination to keep "things simple", focus on the basics and do them to perfection.

Under Brad Thorn's leadership, the Reds are pursuing a solid, clearly defined, simple path. It's a direct, no-nonsense, methodical approach. And it's working. It also promises to rebuild the Club as one of the Great Rugby Clubs on an international scale.

It's a philosophy that stems from Brad's own values and beliefs, in particular, his Christianity. Indeed, it's impossible to know or understand Brad without recognizing his faith. It is what he has "built everything on". He says, "the biggest thing we've built the Club on is care, which is care about each other, care about the cause we're trying to achieve and then about who we represent". It's an approach he attributes to his faith and which reflects how he has gone about his life as a person, player and coach. He says he is "very reliant on God's strength in what I do. I feel I'm here for a reason and I rely on his strength".

It's the notion that one reaps what one sows, that faith, hard work, teamwork, respect, discipline and character lead to results. And more importantly, in doing so, the Club is providing something meaningful to the community through sport.

The Reds to Regions Tour is about keeping things *real* and demonstrates this priority. As QRU CEO David Hanham says of the programme, "It's about us giving back to Queenslanders and it's about us identifying, and our players identifying who they're representing. And to do that, and to make it a genuine connection – it's about us giving service back to Queensland". During this Tour, Brad and the players visit areas of regional Queensland where they stay with local families and participate in a range of experiences from running coaching clinics to working on properties and building fences. It's a wonderfully direct and honest engagement with the community.

Ultimately, if Rugby is to grow and flourish, it requires depth and talent. This requires a solid connection with boys and girls at a grassroots level in order to build a foundation for the future of the sport – to cut off the community would be to sever the life-blood. The Reds are nourishing this cellular foundation and achieving regeneration. As Hanham highlights, in 2021 there was a recorded 175% growth in QLD Reds viewership, a 92% growth in QLD Reds game attendance and a 10% growth in community participation.

Further evidence of the strength of Rugby in Queensland is the world-class \$ 30m National Rugby Training Centre scheduled to be unveiled by the start of 2023.

Brad credits Hanham and indeed, the entire staff at QRU as integral to the reshaping and positive results experienced by the Reds.

Notably, there is a palpable, paternal dimension to Brad's role as Head Coach. He remarks of the players, "Obviously it's really cool seeing them get better at footy but I really like seeing them grow into young men and young men of character. That for me is a joy – to see them at different stages of their lives, and hopefully having an impact".

It was clear when Brad accepted his position that things were going to be markedly different. For instance, the Reds have taken a hard line on unacceptable player behaviour. Many will recall the decision early to terminate the contracts of James Slipper and Karmichael Hunt following serious drug incidents. These "were not easy decisions" says Brad, adding that it was a question of "leadership". Interestingly, the Reds have welcomed and provided new opportunities to players, such as James O'Connor, who have similarly, seriously erred, yet who importantly, have striven to redeem themselves.

Here again, one notes the value of sport to contribute to personal growth and its propensity to provide experiences that are analogous to life. Brad advocates the ability of sport to function as a "vehicle to impact on people to grow to grow to grow". He says, "Team sport's great because, straight away, like in Rugby there are 14 other guys on the field, or in a squad, there's more, and you have to work together and you have to be selfless". Furthermore, in Rugby, "You get knocked over, to get back up takes courage. So that's a great thing for people to apply in other parts of life, to persevere, to work hard with others, to care about people, to have discipline in how you train, and focus and set goals, all that sort of stuff is perfect for anything else in life".

A happily married father of four, Brad is familiar with the many challenges children and young people face today, including that posed by social media. He emphasizes the need to "spend time with children" and to continually "send those positive messages" around things such as respect. He says "giving respect and showing respect. I think it's a huge one in today's society, that maybe is not as good as it was". He emphasizes "the value of working hard and perseverance" and says that "character is so much more important than what you look like. If we can continue to talk about those sort of things that's a positive".

The Queensland Reds are demonstrating that courage and character lead to unlimited opportunities and unknown heights! For tickets see: [Queensland Reds tickets | Tours and Events | Ticketek Australia](#)