



Speech by

Jack Dempsey

MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG

Hansard Thursday, 11 September 2008

BUNDABERG RUGBY LEAGUE CENTENARY

Mr DEMPSEY (Bundaberg—NPA) (9.41 pm): I recently had the pleasure of attending the Bundaberg Rugby League's centenary celebration dinner and, like everyone else there, I could only be inspired by the unheralded presence of Australian Rugby League Team of the Century member Norm Provan. There were also five other former internationals present on the night—Bundaberg Team of the Century members Col Weiss, Noel Gallagher and Noel Cavanagh; Colin Scott, who now coaches in the Bundaberg Rugby League; and Billy Moore, who will always be remembered for his now famous 'Queenslander' call going into a State of Origin battle for the Maroons back in 1995.

This special night was about saluting the proud past 97 years since the Bundaberg Rugby League's formation in 1911. Just like in every other city and town in Queensland, Rugby League is very much a part of the Bundaberg culture, and even before the Bundaberg Rugby League was formed the city was producing proud test players. Bundaberg's own Bill Heidke played for Queensland in the inaugural Rugby League interstate game in 1908, and later that year he played in two tests in the inaugural Kangaroos tour. In 1910 he was given the Australian captaincy over the great Dally Messenger, becoming the first Queenslander to captain the Kangaroos.

It was also pleasing to see Bundaberg Team of the Century player/coach Bill Pearson, who was also named in illustrious company alongside the likes of Cameron Smith, Trevor Gillmeister, Mark Graham and Greg Inglis in the Brisbane Norths Devils greatest team. Although only four of the five surviving members of the Bundaberg Team of the Century could attend, Les Kiss, who is currently the defensive coach for the Irish national Rugby Union team, was represented by his brother Michael.

It was also a red-letter night for Bundaberg Rugby League chairman Mal Breen, who was rewarded for over 40 years of service to the code and was presented with a life membership. Past treasurer Geoff Rackemann also received a special presentation. The outstanding success of the night was also a tribute to the executive members—secretary Chris Sullivan, treasurer Mike Ireland and registrar Terry Dodd—as well as passionate Queensland Rugby League Wide Bay North manager Dave Pearce.

Congratulations also go to all BRL 2008 award winners, especially A Grade Player of the Year Lyal Darby and Senior Representative Player of the Year Matthew Tanner, who recently represented the Queensland Country Rangers. Congratulations also go to Matthew Hall, who received the Les Sommerville Medal for Player of the 2008 A Grade Grand Final, and the Brothers club for completing a remarkable unbeaten season. Bundaberg can also lay claim to the birthplace of Australian Team of the Century member Mal Meninga and most recent test representative Antonio Kaufusi.

Despite its status, League has faced major challenges from the other football codes in recent years, but with the hardworking people I have just mentioned at the helm and with countless club officials and volunteers doing a wonderful job, Rugby League will continue for the next 100 years as the 'greatest game of all', and Bundaberg will continue to be a breeding ground for future champions.