

[Transcript] Between Two Beers Podcast / Russell Packer: From Prison to an MBA, 13 Years in the NRL, and more!

Gentlemen, we want it all.

We want to be well read and not have to read.

We want to save room for dinner and fill up on free bread.

We want to own a motorcycle and not be accused of going through a midlife crisis.

Sadly, we can't have it all.

Unless we're at Sport Clips Haircuts, where we check in with the pros in men's hair and totally check out with Sports Watching Shampoo Massaging Relaxation.

Sport Clips, it's a game changer.

On this episode of Between Two Beers, we talk to Russell Packer.

Russell is a former rugby league player who played for the Warriors, Tigers, Dragons and Kiwis across a 13-year professional career in the NRL.

After retiring from league two years ago, Russell returned to New Zealand with his family and is now a businessman leading a property development project in his hometown of Foxton.

Russell's footy career was divided by one major incident.

In 2013, he was sentenced to two years in prison for assaulting a man outside a pub in Sydney.

It's a definitive part of Russell's story and the impressive man he is today is reflective of the lessons he learned about himself through his darkest days.

We talk about what happened that night in Sydney, how he passed the time in jail and how it changed him, how he got back into the NRL and became a senior leader.

That time, he pissed his pants for the Warriors, his MBA journey and thirst for learning, the realities of raising an autistic son, volunteering in the community and giving back.

Unfortunately, we had a slight technical glitch about a quarter of the way through this one and lost some of the chat about his childhood and the Warriors, which you will later hear referenced.

Russell's life has been one hell of a ride and the thing that stuck with me on this one is his appetite for self-improvement.

His thirst for learning and growing and being a better man is really impressive.

If you're only no rusty from a headline, this ep will change your perception of the man.

We're so proud to be able to tell his story.

Listen on iHeart, or we've got your podcast from, or watch the video on YouTube and follow us on Instagram and TikTok to see the best video clips from each ep.

This episode was brought to you from the Export Beer Garden Studio.

Enjoy!

Russell Packer, welcome to Between Two Beers.

Yeah, cheers lads, thanks for having me here.

It's a privilege to be on and looking forward to it.

So are we, we are fizzling for the set.

We're excited to have you in the Export Beer Garden Studio.

You've made the trip over from Papamoa today, combining the pod with some birthday celebrations for your partner, Lara, who you've been with since you were 16. Special night, Claude?

Yeah, we'll see where the night takes us.

We're pretty old now, so we don't go too hard, but you try and get out for a nice dinner somewhere

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and go to get out of Papamoa and come back up to the big spot.
One of my favourite things about this, Russell messaged us early doors,
just confirming the start time, three o'clock.
Yeah, that's cool, and he just made sure.
I think he said 16 years almost of rugby league
and never want to be late for anything, always double check the time.
Five minutes before, bro, I'm going to be late.
Man sent me the wrong way. He came in, he was mortified.
Mortified. One training you were late for in your career?
Yeah, yeah man, got burnt pretty early on when I was at the Warriors.
I was just 18 when I made my debut there.
And I was in the team, read the itinerary wrong,
and training was at 9am, I thought it was at 12,
so I was doing stuff in the morning, team manager rang,
and he was like, where the fuck are you?
And I was like, oh, so it was pretty embarrassing actually.
As a young kid, I'm in the team and captains run and you're not there,
so your spot's not really secure.
And ever since then, I've always been hard out about time,
even before that I was, but yeah, I'll blame it on my nav man
because it took me through some road works here.
You're amongst good companies and even it's very, very hot on timekeeping as well,
so you get annoyed when he wastes my time, man.
And I do waste a lot of your time, a lot of the time.
Real quick, what was a fine back in those days for missing a captain's run?
There was a bit of money, maybe 500 bucks or something,
but the punishment was more, so from the boys, especially the older guys,
you always feel like you're letting people down or what you said,
but you're taking their time where you've agreed to come,
and it's just a little thing, but it becomes an important thing
when you're trying to be a professional athlete.
So we reached out to you to come on the pod after you followed us on Insta,
and you said that Izzy Whitley struck a chord with you,
especially his line about having someone you had to smooth the rough edges on.
What was it about that pod that sort of connected with you?
Oh, it was cool listening.
As I said, I know his business partner, Aiden, that runs Fit Out Solutions.
He's a good rooster, and he kind of told me the story about Izzy,
and then hearing a story where he grew up over in Gizzy,
having that experience kind of being able to connect with all people,
different people and different, I guess, hierarchy and status and whatnot,
and making his way over here.
I just really love that, that I like reading books and listening to things

and education kind of pieces,
and coming across something that you should hire for strengths
and accept tolerated weaknesses,
and it's basically saying that it's better to have a few rough edges
that you can smooth out.
They don't have any edge at all.
It's hard to create it, and it's a little bit easier to smooth out,
but just, I guess, in my life kind of resonate with that,
because, you know, it's definitely got a few rough edges.
Yeah, that's so cool that you've had a takeaway from a pod with Produce.
That's a little moment for me, but we're going to get into the rough edges
and we're going to get the whole story.
But before we do, Lara has come through big time in the research,
and she has suggested that you recently took up golf,
and you might have got a hole-in-one semi-recently.
Just before you left, I don't normally allow...
It wasn't a might, it was a definite hole-in-one.
I don't normally let golf chat play,
but seeing as we are in the ACC studio,
you did play in the ACC Open down in Te Puke.
I'll let this one play, so indulge us with your hole-in-one story.
Yeah, shout out to the Te Puke golf club.
Benny Martellino got me into golf when I first moved home,
and never played golf before.
I always tell the story.
There were teammates with Benji Martell at a few different clubs
at Wests and at Dragons,
and I think he plays off of five, like he's really good at golf.
He's obviously Benji Martell, so he's the people who invite him to golf trips.
When I was at the Dragons, they had this five-day thing at Jack's Point,
staying on the course and all that,
and he was like, oh, do you want to come?
I was like, nah, bro, I'm not into golf.
Now I look back on it, I was like, oh, that sounds like a mean trip.
It's Jack's Point down in Queenstown.
Yeah, bro.
Yeah, the Dragons boys went there for a week,
and yeah, so it was golf and team bonding and whatnot.
But yeah, Benny took me out to Te Puke,
and I can hit a ball, but just not very accurately.
And this was before.
And I got a birdie, and I was like, oh, this is mean.
Yeah, I think I'm going to get good at it.

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Don't act like you've ever got a birdie.
Don't act like you've ever got a birdie.
Yeah, so I just went out the next day.
I just asked Ben, oh, how much did you spend on clubs?
And I was like, oh, sweet.
I don't want to spend more than that,
because pretty expensive the golf clubs want to get into it.
And just went to the golf shop, brought clubs that were way too short for me.
I was just like, oh, I'm playing golf tomorrow.
I kind of want to leave with a set today.
I don't really care.
And I've played with those for like three months until the Club Pro,
Jacko down at Te Puke, see me swing in,
and he was like, bro, I think those clubs are too short for you.
So he fixed them up for us, and they're legends down there.
But the whole of one story, I was playing with Benny
and one of our other mates down in Papamora.
And I just missed the birdie part.
So, you know, I was playing off a 29 handicap.
So birdies were like massive.
What are you, Steve?
Oh, about 20?
Yeah.
I'm playing off a 13 at the moment, but then I was like 28.
So a birdie was like massive.
I'll jump up and down for a birdie.
Missed a birdie part on 16 at Te Puke, which is a part four.
And then 17 at Te Puke's nice little part three.
And I just walked up without hesitation,
put the ball in, smacked it, and there's like a bunker
and then like a little grass mound over.
And the pin was behind that.
So I was like, yeah, I'm going to have a good chance at birdie again.
And me and Benny and Azul were walking up and about 60 metres up,
like getting close, I couldn't see no white speck.
And I just chucked my clubs on the ground and just ran.
And it was like, man, I think it was quite late in the night too.
And I reckon I would have woken up some of the farmers
if they're having a midday nap.
But man, I was pumped.
It was like, I'm a pretty emotional person.
Like if someone, if you've done a long ass putt for double bogey,
but I would jump up and down.

Which wouldn't happen to me.
Very clear, which wouldn't happen.
All right, you made your point.
Yeah, so I got up, I had a look in the hole and I was just, yeah.
It was kind of, I don't know, I don't want to relate it to footy
because it's different, but it was almost like a game
when we scored a try right at the end.
It was just like, yeah, I was pumped.
Etiquette, Etiquette, you got to shout the clubhouse
when you get back in, right?
Now they changed the rule.
They put on a shout out there.
They give you, they give you a couple of options.
Yeah, I think I was just at the golf club the other day
and one of the older members had a hole in one.
I think they give a bar shout so they put on two hot bottles
or whatever it is, it's equivalent of 150 or 200 bucks.
Yeah, nice.
I love, by the way, the detail that golfers,
recreational golfers go into when they retell their stories.
It's amazing.
It actually is genuinely amazing.
I do, I do, I give Stephen a lot of shit,
but it's cool for people, I think, to find that pastime
because for some people, they absolutely love it.
For me, it's not for me, but yeah.
You've got a beautiful swing there.
I know I've got a beautiful swing.
Well, the story that I mentioned about Benji,
I didn't really understand, you know,
that kind of mental aspect of golf,
like getting out of the house,
like it hits on a lot of good things for your wellbeing,
your outside and the elements and the environment.
You're generally with a couple of good friends
or you're meeting new people and you get to walk
and you get to move around.
Yeah.
But exercise, it's a challenging game
and it's like, you know, even Tiger Woods can do a bad shot.
So it's like, you can never master it.
And that's...
You're speaking a statement so good.

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Yeah, totally relate to you.

That's the part of golf I didn't appreciate
from the outside was the social element of it.

So I've recently started, I don't know,
a year or year and a half or so ago.

And one of my good mates in Hamilton, we go out all the time.

And he's a best mate who, over the last 10 years,
we haven't had that many good conversations,
but you spend three hours walking around a golf course
and you connect in a different way.

Like a friendship is stronger than ever
based on seven rounds together, you know?

Yeah, yeah.

It's the next side of it.

Well, from that perspective, why I love playing
and playing with different people is because,

I guess in society now, we're so busy
and when we're around people, we're not that present in general,
you know, like, whether we're having a conversation
at the coffee shop or even when I came in here,
I was texting my missus back.

So you're talking, but I'm texting her back
and you're not fully present in that moment.

And I think with golf, like, not many people walk around
with their phones texting and they put it on airplane mode
or that's your time and you give your time and energy
to those people.

And I think that's why the connections with people
that you play golf with become so good
because you give each other your energy
and, yeah, people like that
and you get to know people really well.

So right, man.

So my life is just always with a screen attached to me
and golf is the time where the phone goes in the bag
and it's three hours and you're detached.

Yeah, it's special.

Golf and swimming, two releases.

Yeah, no, actually, I rate that.

I rate that.

So, like I said, Lara has pulled through for us big time on this.
She sent us so much gold, like maybe the best,
like, inside lines that we've had.

So much goodness to come.
But a bunch of photos and videos
and one of them was of you in...
Sydney.
In Sydney with Wim Hof.
And I think Wim Hof is in a nice bath
and you're sort of dancing behind him.
And he's a character who I find incredibly fascinating
on big into the cold immersion.
But how did that come apart
and what part does cold immersion play in your life?
Yeah, yeah, massive.
So got interested.
I read a book called
What Doesn't Kill Us by Scott Carney.
And then I met an awesome dude,
Kiwi dude, Nigel Beach,
who's a Wim Hof instructor.
He's a legend of a bloke.
And he actually came when I was playing for the West Tigers
and done a seminar for the whole team.
We played up in Whangarei,
but we stayed over in the shore for a few days
and had a little camp back in 2019.
And Nigel came over, done breathing techniques.
And, you know, I'd been exposed to it by reading
and then trying the ice baths
and trying to get into a little bit of meditation
and all these kind of things that are associated with that.
And then when I met Nigel,
he brought us, you know, ice tarps
and all the boys had a go at it.
And it was awesome.
And then I just kind of picked up from there
a couple of the boys and at the West Tigers,
they were interested in it too.
So, you know, we used to do it together and Lara's done it.
She's actually everybody that doesn't kind of know her
because she's quite quiet and I'm not so quiet.
But she's a really determined person
and, you know, we got quite obsessive about it
and she stayed in there for nearly 40 minutes one day.
Yeah, bro.

What sort of temperature?
Oh, it was low, man.
It was like around a degree
because we used to get these little pool things
and she was like, oh, yeah,
I'm not going to die in my own life.
If you worry about dying, get out.
But, yeah, she didn't die, obviously.
She made it?
Yeah, she made it through the other side.
But, yeah, and through Nigel,
Nigel connected me with Wim Hof
and a whole bunch of other people
and invited us over to a house of instructors
and, you know, got to do an ice bath with women
and some of the other people that were there.
So, yeah, they're all cool, man.
Everyone, I guess, kind of gets into the cold exposures
and it's, I guess, it happens at a certain time
for people when they're kind of searching for things
or, you know, you're like, oh,
I need some kind of adversity in your life
or so that's kind of how I found it.
I was like looking for things
and I just listened.
We're talking about Diary of a CEO
and I just listened to the one with Rich Roll,
you know, the podcast man and the lawyer
who was an alcoholic and, you know,
being through a heap of shit in his life
and he said some people are wired for extremes
in his podcast.
And that, you know, struck a chord with me
because he talked about balance and that
and some people are obsessive.
Like, if you're good at golf, you're normally quite obsessive.
You practice six hours a day or whatever, you know,
you got to have some level of imbalance in you
and, yeah, I guess things like that
if you're searching for things.
It's like positive adversity, the ice bath
and once you overcome it, it's pretty cool.
So a man drawn to the extremes kind of sags

quite nicely into this next story,
like, has fed us and it's about a snow planet.
So she said this one time, he said,
you couldn't ski but refused to let go
of the conveyor belt.
And so you got dragged to the top
and decided to come down the expert lane.
He said it was an incredibly painful watch
for everyone involved.
But somehow from that, you got the confidence
to try out the expert lane up in the mountain
in Queenstown.
So the question is, is it true
that you rolled all the way down the hill
and the ski patrol had to come in and check on you?
Yeah, bro.
Any of the boys that went to that Queenstown trip
in 2013 at the Warriors will probably remember this,
but the snow planet one was way before that
when we were younger.
I think I was on skis and I'd never really been
to the snow before.
And I'm overconfident by nature.
So I was like, oh, you're sweet.
And you know, those little things that,
what are they called?
The seats that come around.
Little toe ropes.
Yeah, like the toe ropes that you meant to put in your bum.
Yeah, show us how to do it.
And I was like, oh, sweet.
And when I put it in, it slipped out.
And then I was like a little bit,
I was probably like 15% of the way up
and I was just like, oh, fuck it.
I'm just going to hold on all the way to the top.
And I got up to the top
and I had snow all down my fucking pants.
And yeah.
But once I made the commitment bro, I was just like,
well, I'm at the top.
I'm going down the way that they intended.
So I fell all the way down.

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And the one in Queenstown,
we had a massive few days down there.
End of year, boys trip kind of thing.
Like a Mad Monday situation.
Mad Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday.
Yeah, it was a team bonding trip.
And we ended up down there.
We had had a big night the night before.
And one of the Aussie boys that used to play here,
Toddy Larry, he's a legend.
He was like, oh, let's all go skiing or snowboarding.
I was like, oh, fuck.
I'm probably going to be hungover as man.
And obviously my experience in the snow wasn't that,
wasn't that positive.
So we all went there.
Most of us were pretty like, pretty hungover.
And same thing, man.
We were all on the beginner slopes.
And I think I grabbed the snowball that time.
The shoes were like too small.
I had sore feet.
And, you know, the carousel thing.
And then it came around.
And I think they had one on the outside that went up.
And I was just like, oh, fuck it.
I'm going to go up.
And by the time I got to the top, I was regretting it.
Like, because I was by myself and I was like, ah.
And then same thing.
I'm like, whoa, I've come this far.
There's only one way to go.
There's only one way down.
And, bro, I was bailing probably, like,
I reckon every 15 meters, like,
because I didn't really know how to snowboard.
And one of those dudes in the red coat came over to me
and he was like, bro, I've been watching you for, like,
a little bit.
You look like you're struggling.
Do you want me to get the snowmobile thing to come and get you?
And I was like, ah, nah, bro, I'll be good.
Pride kicks in.

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Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I was like, ah, nah, nah.

I want to just see if I can make it down myself.

But if I was in hindsight, I should have took the snowmobile.

But, you know, then I wouldn't be able to share this story.

Was that your only run of the day?

I'm out, guys.

After that, yeah, literally after that,

I remember I took everything off and walked inside the warm thing

where the other boys were going and, yeah.

Things you do when you're younger.

We'll be right back after this short break.

She said that it happens in surfing too.

She says, you always go straight out to the massive waves with the experienced guys.

Get smashed and go again.

Way out of your league, but there's this deep belief in yourself to keep pushing.

And I want to sort of link that up to that belief that has helped with your studies

because she's also given us some great info about the MBA program.

Can you tell us about the Australian Graduate School of Management MBA that you did?

Yeah, yeah.

So I guess those stories probably just represent, I guess, my character or whatever that I'm willing to take on.

Challenge that most people, you know, wouldn't do it or whatever.

But obviously everyone at Google's my name knows that I went to jail

and I've been in trouble and whatnot.

And when I got out of jail, I was always smart at school.

Like, I went to high school yearly.

I was the head boy of my college, believe it or not.

But I always done well academically.

So the actual work wasn't, you know, I wasn't concerned about doing that kind of stuff.

But when I got out of jail, I think people just looked at me and thought,

oh, he's just a big dumb cunt.

Which quite a lot of people do say to me when I meet him.

Like, I thought you were just a big dumb cunt.

I didn't finish school because I signed at the Ways when I was 16 in typical fashion of me.

I made the decision to leave school early so I could come here and start training.

And I had enough credits to pass and I had a scholarship to go to uni and whatnot.

But I just, I went all in on rugby league and probably not what they tell you.

You know, hedge your bets and not everyone can be a professional athlete and all this thing.

But the same thing, I was just like, well, I'm going to put all my eggs in that basket and go hard.

So I didn't finish high school.

When I got out of jail, I wanted to go to uni.

I wanted to do something with my mind because I had a lot of time to think in there about, you know,

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some of the issues that I've had in my life and why those happened and what's the future look like and what can I control when I was, I wanted to do a business degree, but I had to first do a community service degree through TAFE.

Done that, got into uni.

It was kind of like an opportunity to get into uni because I don't think people thought I could pass or whatever.

And I've done accounting and I've always been good at maths.

At high school, I liked maths. I'd done physics and all that stuff.

So more of a black and white brain or maths orientated brain.

And I got good marks in the accounting subject and that was just a commerce degree.

And then the next year, I just done undergraduate papers, commerce degree.

And I had, like, good marks across all of them.

And Ben Cray, you know, the old player from St George.

Yeah, Ben and Cray, he had just retired and he moved into the education and wellbeing space.

And he came to me, well, yeah, it would have been Ender 216, beginning 217.

He goes, bro, like, I've known you for a couple of years now because I've been here.

There might be an opportunity for you to jump out of that and get into a master's programme.

I was like, oh, yeah, fuck you, that sounds all good.

I'll give it a crack.

And yeah, so then...

To give it context, though, it's like, I've got a note here.

That school is in the top 10% of the world's business schools, right?

Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's ranked in the top 50 in the world in business skills, AGSM.

So it's an awesome place to learn.

A lot of really successful people have been through that institution

and, you know, they're making a big mark on the world,

but it's a University of New South Wales business school.

But I didn't actually start there in my...

I started the programme that Benny recommended that I do was a graduate certificate in business, which implies you normally graduated from something previously,

but they said, you know, they take people that have worked somewhere for 20 years,

but they never went to uni, but they know a lot about business

and they just want to formalise their education or their knowledge.

And yeah, I went there.

I graduated from that in 2017, so that's kind of like the stepping stone.

That would be, yeah, the under-20s of the MBA.

And then once I graduated from there, I went to...

I applied to go to AGSM.

Yeah, because I just...

I wanted to challenge myself and I was moving to Sydney at the time from Wollongong and the campus was located there, so I applied and had to write a big

kind of entry kind of thesis of why you want to attend.

And yeah, it's not like it's hard to get into or whatever.

Well, I understand that you're making that story because it's an incredible achievement just to get to the start line.

Well, I'll tell you the rip like that, and you know, bit of serendipity or whatever we're talking about, the reason why I'm coming on this podcast is at the same time that I listen to the Izzy One and then I'm listening to another podcast that says like, imagine if you just lived your whole week where you couldn't say no and they talk about the Amazon yes and then you come to me and I'm like, OK, I'll say yes, and here we are.

But when I was doing my research on AGSM, again, just fate or whatever, but Marina Goh, who's an alumni of AGSM, and at the same time she was the chairperson of the board at West Tigers. And when I got the brochure, she was being smack on the middle of it and so I had just signed at the West Tigers, so I asked Ivan to put us in touch and Marina became a bit of a mentor to me going through that process and gave me a lot of encouragement to go for it and then I applied and graduated in 2020.

With top marks?

Look, I wanted over there, if you get over 80%, you graduate with excellence so that was my goal to graduate with excellence.

When I first started, that was in 2018.

I ended up graduating with 79, so one off.

But in a way, I've reflected on that a lot.

It's like, what is enough?

It's like, one more mark and that made me different and throughout my MBA journey, I had a lot of injuries.

I had three surgeries on my foot.

I got two screws.

I was playing with a few injuries

and then my form wasn't good and wasn't really getting played much at the West Tigers and I was getting older and my perspective on life just changed a little bit.

It was cool to strive for things, but it's not the be all

and end all of there's a big cost, so probably to go back to that balance thing

just brought a bit of perspective of sometimes one extra mark

and a little piece of a name on my degree would have been cool

for the street creditor of a whole one.

But it doesn't mean anything about who you are as a person and how good at golf you are.

It just means that you got it one time

and that's how I've explained it way to myself anyway.

I think it's something to really be proud of.

This is an incredibly difficult school you've graduated with, in my opinion, top marks.

I want to start building into the rugby league stuff.

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You made a comment there because you were big, you got picked on.

You were a big unit.

I was a fat kid.

You were sizeable, just fat, strong as well.

I was just fat, yeah.

But I can show you photos.

I was also a combination which is probably rare
which is fat but aggressive.

And your senior rugby league career started early doors, right?

Teenage years, 14, 15?

14.

I saw those earlier stories.

I've always been a kid that's probably been thinking wise,

like a little bit older, and then also too, like as I said,

I went to high school year early, so I was 12

and I was good at rugby, so all of a sudden, bang,

my 10 minutes, 15.

You know, like three years, age gap, and then...

And when you're running in a team, you're running in a team.

You're going to a party, you're going to that party as well, right?

And they're looking after you because you're the youngest
in the group, I imagine.

And they'll also come and drink this, and we'll have this
and try this and do that, right?

Yeah.

And then also too, like, in my whole life, because I was big,

I always played up, so I played with my brother's teams

which is two years older.

So by the time I was 14, like, I'd been playing the games.

You know, like when I was 10, I was playing against 13-year-olds.

So when I was 13 now, I'm playing against six, 17-year-olds.

When I was 14, 15, that's when I started playing League.

I was like, yeah, well...

And are you holding your own?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

That blows my mind to think of, like, 14-year-old, 15, 16-year-old
playing senior men's...

Yeah.

Like, we come from a football background.

Like, it's not that unusual for a 15, 16-year-old to play senior football,
but you know that they're youngsters.

In a collision sport like Rugby League, man, that must be...

Yeah.

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You must learn some quick lessons in that environment as well.

Well, I always wanted to be an all-black.

Like, Foxton's...

Well, the Haudenosaunee was a massive, like, it's a rugby area.

And growing up, I always, like, I actually went to the Murray-Mexley Academy for rugby.

I got a scholarship to go there.

Oh, Iran's, isn't it the one?

Oh, yeah, it was back in the day.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Because in Palmy, you know, that big...

Yeah.

...burned building, and they hosted us there.

So I made the Haudenosaunee Secondary Schools team when I was 14.

So I was pretty good at rugby.

But what ended up happening, the story behind how I got into League is, I think...

I can't remember exactly how many, but there was probably, you know, six of us from the first 15 team at one or two college.

That went and just started training with the local League team called the Levine Lions.

And Dave Lomax, who was a former NRL player and, you know, Lomax brother, so a massive League family, he was the coach of that team.

And we, all these boys from this high school, a couple of the older fellas played for the Levine Lions, and they were like, oh, come over and have a bit of training.

We need some numbers.

I was like, sweet.

We never done some training.

I was like, fuck, this is way different than being a proper rugby.

You know, I get to run heaps and tackle.

And, you know, I had a pretty bad back and couldn't squat.

So I was like, oh, yep, for the scrummaging and that.

And I was like, we played a trial game.

And, yeah, I just loved it.

Principal and coach got caught one of it.

And we had a big, like, emergency meeting.

Like, imagine the first 15 of a small country town.

It was like big.

We used to have, like, quite a lot of people at our games, our first 15 games at the college.

And it was big of them for the town.

And out of all of the boys, probably shows to my character

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of being a bit defiant.
They said you can't play rugby league and being the first 15.
And choose one.
All the other boys went back to the first 15.
And I just said, oh, sweet.
I'm going to go do league.
So my first full year of rugby league,
I played for the Levin Lions, which was a team full of,
I was the youngest, obviously, 15.
We had a couple of old Super League players,
Sonny Fockardo, local legend, he played in the Super League.
Dave played for us, his brother Tony.
So I was at 15, I was training and playing with dudes
that played in the Super League, played in and around.
So it was, you know, it was in the deep end ship,
but it's confidence building.
And yeah, that's how I got my start for rugby league.
Basically, I don't think of David was the coach.
Dave and his wife, Toei, they kind of, you know,
supported me in my start of my rugby league,
opened a few doors.
I wasn't on the radar for, in the national scene, because...
No one comes down to live in the water.
Yeah, yeah, yeah, I wasn't playing.
Yeah, I wasn't playing in any of these, you know,
these great comps.
And Dave, like, had to ask a favour, I think,
for one of his old friends at NZRL, said,
just ask a favour, he goes,
oh, please, just give him a trial.
Like, he's playing with us.
I think he's, you know, he's worth a trial.
So we came up here.
Yeah, I'd have right up here with someone,
or someone, one of the whanau took me up or something like this.
We had a few days at King's College.
It was all the best players, New Zealand under 16s
and under 18s players.
And we'd done the old-school trial,
and, yeah, made the team,
and ended up captaining that team,
and we toured to Aussie,
played three games over there, undefeated.

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So, yeah, with that...
And then the next year,
started playing bar-de-card,
and, yeah, again, 16.
Quite a lot of the old,
well, my era kind of Warriors players,
we all cut our teeth in the bar-de-card.
Quite similar systems.
It's like, I think,
hopefully they can implement
a more of a national competition
for rugby league players,
because Ben Martellino is from Wellington.
We came through the bar-de-card system.
Me at the Central Falcons,
that are better boys,
what called bestallians,
and Simon Mannering, too, from down south.
He played in the Wellington Orcas,
so quite a lot of the old...
Like, my era,
the boys at the Warriors,
we went from Auckland, yeah,
and we all cut our teeth in the bar-de-card.
Being a kid that played in a men's rugby league team,
did you have a confidence or a swag about you
when you went back into your own age group?
I never played in my...
There wasn't a competition.
Like, in those NZ kind of squads,
when you go into those, and you're like,
do I play against 35-year-old builders every week?
Like, what's this guy going to do?
Builders.
35-year-old dudes with tattoos on their face.
Yeah.
Like, that's the reality of it, right?
So when you went into those environments,
you're like, fuck, well, I can handle myself here.
Oh, yeah, yeah.
We used to have scraps like on-field scraps
when I played for Levin.
Heaps of the boys were, you know,

involved in gangs and all that,
and the other teams that we played in.
You know, it's a game,
and we always had hard games
and a few little scuffles here and now on-field,
but it's always sweet afterwards,
because it was back in the old day
where, you know, you get in the club rooms
and a couple of the aunties
and a few of the, you know, coaches' wives
would cook food for us,
and, you know, we'd always have a few drinks,
and...
I think there was only six or 17, so...
In that area, rugby leagues,
you've got to be, you know,
you've got to be keen as to play rugby league,
because you...
There's no money in it where...
If you're good at rugby in, like, one or two,
you might get, you know, 100 bucks
or a couple of 100 bucks a game
to play for a good club, like cardboard,
or whatever,
so if you want to play league, it's like...
And was that the mentality?
Like, confrontation on the field,
whistle goes, shake hands, meet in the club rooms,
everything's kind of forgotten?
That kind of old-school mentality
of what happens there, happens there,
and then we go away and go our separate ways.
Yeah, yeah, yeah, we had a good team.
We ended up winning the comp that year,
the Western Alliance,
I think it was called, so...
That was great fun, like, as a...
Imagine a 15-year-old kid,
you're at high school,
and...
Yeah, some of my teammates were like 40,
and, you know,
I was younger than some of their kids and shit.

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But we used to get on a bus
and
we would head up to Taranaki,
because there was a couple of teams
in the Taranaki area, Maris Balblock
and Hawera,
yeah, so, you know, rough areas,
and I remember one time,
I think it was Maris Balblock,
half of our team got on the piss
on Friday night, the night before,
and from living to Hawera,
it was about three and a half hours,
and we always used to pick some of the boys up,
like, they would get rides to the State Highway,
you know, maybe from their girlfriend or whatever,
and they would just stand on the road.
Anyway, we
ended up going up there with, like,
12 players,
and the bus driver ended up having to jump on there.
LAUGHTER
Yeah, bro, so,
it was pretty fun, like, it was a good way
to, I guess,
get a bit of life experience,
but what you said, like,
you know, I was
exposed to, well,
I was one of the better players in the team,
even though I was 15, so
we were sponsored by a pub,
and after the games, well,
naturally you're going to go back to the sponsors' location
and have a few drinks, so...
And you're not going to be left out in the car park? Yeah.
Yeah, exactly, yeah.
Without getting the public into any trouble,
well, yeah, you know, like...
We'll be right back
after this short break.
The Russell Packer story, as far as I can see,
is kind of divided

by this line, and there's the person
who we're talking about now,
and the stuff you're going through,
and there's the person on the other side
who's in front of us now, and you've got this perspective,
and there was a big
incident which
has created that perspective shift.

Are you able to go into
as much or as little detail as you want
about the lead-up to what happened in Sydney,
and then we can start talking about
what happened afterwards? Yeah, yeah.

Yeah, for sure.

Like, that whole situation,

I put myself in a bad position,

but,

like, just

anyone that was a part of the case,

like, they portrayed it like

I King had someone from behind, and all that,

which wasn't the case, like, I got hit,

and I went too far, which is what happened.

And in my life, and if I've done anything,

I've always been like, yeah, I did it,

and, you know, I've tried to have

some justification, because

that's how it grew up, like, oh, well,

you know, they done this and that, and

it was the wrong thing,

and I played guilty for a reason,

because, you know, I didn't...

This is this powerful thing

about narratives and sharing stories.

It's like, we hear stories,

and we just tend to believe them.

And when they come from people

or places that

have credibility, then, again,

we're more likely to believe them,

and that's myself included, so

that was something.

Coming out of there, that was

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quite a lot of people now still
come up and ask me, oh, you just,
you know, hit someone for no reason, why did you do that?
I was like, well, you know,
that's what it said, but that's
not what actually happened, and
anyway, I played guilty,
I fucked up, I did the wrong thing,
I put myself in a bad position, I put myself...
I put, more importantly,
I put my family in a bad position,
I put my kids without a father for a year.
Going to jail
in hindsight
was probably one of the best,
better things that happened to me at that period.
As I said in 2013,
I should have been in rehab, like I was just...
Yeah, I was struggling
with a lot of shit, demons, which now I can...
I'm 10 years older now, like,
2013 when, yeah, 2023,
I was just a kid
in my brain, and,
you know,
didn't expect to go to jail,
um,
thought I was gonna,
you know,
get, um,
get a lesser punishment, but, um,
yeah, I ended up getting sentenced to two years in jail,
um, from that.
Um, Pell didn't got down to one year,
so I spent one year in jail.
I've read something about your lawyer,
even surprised, like, when the two-year sentence
was handed down,
he didn't think that was on the cards.
Like, that must have
been an incredible shock.
Um, yeah,
yeah, I got rid of

that lawyer real quick, but it was just like,
the other thing too, man,
when you actually start
learning about the law, and
I started doing a law degree
at Auckland Law School too,
so I've done a little bit
stuff around statutory
interpretation and understanding
legislation and, you know, what the
intention of law is, so
I've had a different perspective as well,
but, um, yeah, look,
I was an example at a time, and
I just accept it, bro. It's, um,
it happened
at that time for a reason,
and when I look back on it now,
um, you just have to accept
the situation and, um,
use it to grow and move forward,
and probably,
like, um, you know, we talked
about ice bars and all that.
If you just resist all the time,
you don't really last long and
takes a lot of energy, and once you learn
how to let go and accept
the environment and accept things,
and, you know, do the
best with the things that are in your control, then
it's a lot better for you mentally, so, um,
yeah, that's what I came
to, but it was tough, bro. It was like,
fucking,
I just got
through jail, like, um,
quite a few of my family members have
been in and out of jail and whatnot,
so, um, cousins
and stuff,
and, um,
it's,

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I wasn't,
I'm not really, I wouldn't say,
you know, I'm not
scared of things in that way,
like, oh, I wonder what it'll be, because I don't,
no point wasting my energy
thinking, oh, it's going to be like this,
or it's going to be like this, so I just
put one step
and one foot in front of the other,
and, um,
like, for the most part, bro,
jail was just really boring,
it just gave you a lot of time to reflect, like,
you're stuck.
The first month that I did in jail, bro, I was,
I was in, um, I was in,
like, socially isolated cell,
there, because I was a famous.
I was going to say, was it because of your profile?
Yeah, yeah, so the,
um, the jail
people, they were like, oh, this guy's going to get
stabbed and extorted and all this things,
and so they forced me to
stay in this, um, in this cell
for a month, yeah, for over a month,
so it was 23 hours a day
locked down, and, um,
yeah, good,
good, like,
it was time for a lot of,
um, reflection, and why the
fuck am I in this position?
My behaviour, my actions,
put me here, and...
Pardon my ignorance, but how quick
is it between a
guilty verdict and actually going
to jail? Is it, like,
complete ignorance? Is it, like, same
day, like, are you taken away and you go straight in, or is there a...
Yeah, yeah, well, that day...

Detention period, or, I don't know...
Well, that day was, so I played guilty,
and normally people come back for their sentencing,
so the pleas entered or whatever,
and then the court,
you know, judge goes to lunch
and then come back in the afternoon for sentencing,
so, you know, it was just,
um,
yeah, sitting around with my lawyer,
and none of them mentioned
jail, and, oh, yes, it was all looking
good for whatever they thought the recommended
sentence was, and then
heard two years jail, and,
um, I'm pretty,
I guess, like, perceptual,
but, um,
there was, like, two massive,
like, prison guards
behind me, and then the judge yelled
at me to stand up in his court,
and then I looked around, and I was like,
ah, yeah,
like, I could anticipate what was coming,
and obviously
they probably put some
security there, not knowing if I'd freak out
or whatever, and, um, yeah,
it was,
that was just a situation, but as I said,
I played guilty,
you know, I fucked up, I did the wrong thing,
um, in a bad position,
albeit it's
never been portrayed as,
as how it actually
occurred, but that's,
I guess it's not important 10 years,
um, in the future, but,
you know, you talk about things,
it's like, you struggle generally
with things that you think aren't fair, like,

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I don't why not, yeah,
I did these things, and I know
they were wrong, and that's why I played guilty,
but what you're saying about
me there isn't true, which
is what I struggle with mentally, because it's
just, you know,
it was bad for my family, and
on top of me being in jail, because
it was like,
why you, you know, my
missus had to answer, why you, in a
relationship with someone that just runs up
behind anyone and just hits them for no particular
reason, so,
you know, that was just like,
just that, having those conversations
with people, that was hard, and even
having conversations with my kids about going to
jail bros being,
my daughter's 13, nearly.
Thank you so much for sharing
the stuff with us.
I'm interested in the mentality shift
when you're in there, so you get a sentence
that initially you think you're doing two years,
and it gets reduced to one, but in those initial stages
it's two.
Do you remember
how you changed mentally? Like, in the
initial stages, was it days, weeks, it was
anger and frustration, and then it became
sort of acceptance, and then it became
I'm gonna change?
You've done the grief loss steps,
yeah, denial, anger,
bargaining, depression,
and then acceptance. Was it
textbook for you, like that? Bro,
yeah, well straight to anger,
yeah, I wasn't in denial, I was
in jail, yeah, I wasn't looking
around thinking, is this real? I was like, fuck,

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this is, this is not what I was told, and obviously that came with a lot of anger based on a mismatch of expectations, so, but, yeah, bro, I was getting to the acceptance was a long time, and you know, like, jail was what, it's a, it's society's punishment when you get convicted or you plead guilty of a crime, and that's in general, mentor and balance the crime out or whatever, as the sentence recommended to you know, square the ledger also, in a simple way, in my view anyway, but so I was doing that, and then on top of that I knew that I wasn't probably going to be able to play NRL again or in the short term, which the game was like, and my mind, you know, was like, oh, well that's unfair, like, I'm doing my time now, you know, that says a young kid looking at it, but you know, I really appreciate the support that the NRL gave me after I got out that St. George Dragons guess how saved my career and my life in a way by giving me a place to call home giving me a place to re-establish myself and reconnect with my family, so I'll be forever indebted to that club

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you know
St. George of the Wild Dragons
the CEO, Peter Douse
at the time, the head coach at the time
who came
and seen me in jail, signed me
Paul McGregor, Mary McGregor
you know, I'll never
not have
gratitude in my life for him, how he helped
and treated
my family as well, him and his wife
Nick, you know, kind of
took us in there as like
looked after our kids and, you know, just
to have that kind of support
when you're really at the bottom
of
as low as you can kind of go
you know, when you go to jail
it's like, and then
the story around it is unknown
so everybody has their own thing
and it's like, okay cool
we're out now, what do I do
gonna try and play league again
got two kids and
yeah bro, it was
it was hard, but it was worth it and
as I mentioned about NRL
you know, they encouraged me
and even the RLPA
and the dragons
they had this big team and obviously
they were incentivised because they wanted me to play for their team
but then also
helping me go to those cognitive brain
therapy sessions and
giving me work opportunities
when I first got out and you know
giving me some hope and some optimism
for my future which
which is always needed when

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when you're in a low patch it's
I read a book
that was recommended to me when I just got out of jail
A Man's Sit For Meaning
by Victor Frankel
my brother recommended me to read it
when I was in my early 20s and I never got
around to it
your brother makes a good
recommendation in my opinion but
I read that book and
Victor Frankel was a psychiatrist
before the war
and then he survived
he survived
those camps
and he read a book about it and how he did that
and I recommend that book for anyone
that's going through stuff
as
we're all
when we go through hard stuff
we don't know if we can get through it until we get through it
and that book was
a real
fascinating read for me
because
I connected a few of the dots
that were unconnected at that time
about
having goals
having
things to look forward to in the future
was there a person
or a moment
that galvanized your spirit when you were
in jail to think
I've got to pull myself out of
the depths where I am right now
yeah bro
there was
and I've shared this story a few times
my daughter

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Madison
who's
13 soon
she was 3 at the time
her birthday is in August so it was like 8 months
into the sentence
I was at a farm jail
in the back of New South Wales
country a place called Obron
it was real cold it was like
1200 meters above that snow there and shit
and so
they were like if you want to escape
you'll freeze to death before you reach the next town
so it was quite lack security wise
it was very minimum security
Lara Madison
Mali came and she was
talk about
someone that's just back to you
to the death man
I'm very lucky and a lot of people
remind me of that and I definitely
agree with them but
she brought the kids out
and Madison was having a birthday party
and you know it was like
after the visit
Madison was
3
we were in our separate ways at the visit
and then she ran back to me
when I was going through the prison gate
and then it was like oh dad
birthday on Wednesday
can you come
and I was just like fuck
yeah
that was the real moment
where I was like fuck this shit
and just like
I've been a selfish car and I've put myself
and my family in this position

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and now I've got to answer a 3 year old
kid, my daughter
who
I meant to be the person trying to give her
the best
you know
upbringing and trying to
give her a stable environment
to grow and learn and become the best
version of herself and
yeah
I actually felt like a piece of shit after that
like as you do
you go internal and then you're like
fuck
yeah
just had a lot
of thoughts
and I was like I've got to just sort
shit out and
try and get to the bottom of it and
I'm still trying like every day
is a different battle for people that deal
with anger issues
or substance abuse issues
or even addiction
or talk about ritual like wide folk streams
like why is he doing
ultramarathon
why doesn't he just do unmarathon
you know you kind of got that
pushing nature in your own
and stuff so
I just really yeah
got into a lot of reading
and read a lot of books like that one
like Man's Search for Meaning and
not that you can
it
it's how many people in the world are religious
and
the bible has changed their life
you know I'm not religious myself but

any book like in
the bible is one
easy example but it does have
the messages and the stories and it has the power
to help someone
change their life and
not just one book but
a whole list of things
yeah
and the toughest moment
and then you've made that very clear
decision you're going to change and you're going to be better
and then as release date
gets near
I'm assuming you're sort of counting down the days
are you a totally changed
man on that release day
and do you remember like the emotion
like the emotion of walking out of jail
must have been overwhelming yeah bro
it was very overwhelming
cause you seemed like
you're in a heightened state
all the time
some of the people that I was
they were just there like
that killed four people
you know done some pretty
like heavy crimes
and we're into mingling so it's like
you know actually
you're just a bit more heightened you know
someone
at the supermarket walks behind you
so that's kind of the transition
out of it
but I don't
you know
you know changing isn't like turning on
a light it doesn't just
yeah it takes time
anyone that
you say you're a changed man or

you're always changing or
I went to a couple of AA meetings while I was in jail
and that's why they always say that they're always
recovering cause you don't
get to an end point and then it's finished
you know cause new shit pops up
and hard things happen
in life and what do you fall back to
you fall back to the things that make
you feel comfortable which is drinking
you know
drugs
gambling whatever
whatever your vice is
yeah it's definitely
it's definitely not a destination
that I've arrived at it's something that
I'll try and be mindful of and you know
I still have some of my times
where it's like
yeah things happen
in life and you have struggles
and
you've just got to have
an awareness that
that's all good to be saying
like oh yeah I'm not feeling the best
or I'm not don't have the same energy
that I have today that I did
two months ago which is
having these conversations
is good life
I've met some awesome people down
in Papua, people that
do heaps of different things, former cops
we have a weekly
group down at Gather
Gather and Papua Moral Beach if anyone
wants good coffee but every
Thursday morning and I got invited
into it when I first went down
6.30, 6.30 a.m.
opened all

kind of policy and
it's awesome and we have some
some of the boys
have done very well in business and doing
very well and everyone's from
different walks of life, some former cops
and you know a wide variety
of stories and people
and we talk about some things
you know like post-traumatic stress
disorder which is affecting a lot of
cops and
firefighters and issues like that
which I guess it's
it's cool that it's
becoming more normalised now that
people can share those stories and not be trapped by their
emotions and
be able to be vulnerable to other people
totally and this is
so good, thank you so much for being so
vulnerable, this is tough
to go through but we've arrived at
what I think is the beginning
of the really cool part and this is what
I was looking forward to getting to and
I'm not sure how to tell the story, you would know better than
me but
linking up from getting out of jail
getting yourself back on the footy field
playing professional rugby again
becoming part of sort of captain leadership
groups up to your business success
now and your ability to share
this message and inspire others so
I don't know what part of the piece
you want to talk about but is it
how hard was it to get yourself
fit again to get back in NRL
was that always the goal
was always to get back on the field?
Yeah bro, yeah
I used to smoke cigarettes

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even when I played at the Warriors
when I went to jail I smoked
quite a lot
played hit the cards and I didn't
mentally I didn't have any motivation
to train
like I trained and I put on heaps
of weight in there and I didn't do much
and then
when the goal, when there was light at the end of the tunnel
with about three months to go
one of my good mates from
from jail dunks
we were cell mates for like four or five months
and he was real fit
and surfed dude and so
yeah with about three months I just
kind of snapped and I was like oh fuck
we're gonna get out sooner
we'll just start trying to get into some shape
and getting back into that zone and
yeah
and coming out I
took me about
three months
took me about three months to
actually be allowed to play a game
but probably mentally
like in my head I was like oh yeah
I reckon I could
pump out 15 minutes of grade if I needed to
like
that's what I thought you know
I guess that's kind of what got me through jail
visualizing playing a game and
because how soon into that jail
journey did the club
interests start to come through
because my understanding is it wasn't just the dragons
there were a few clubs that were keen on
being part of your reintegration
into society yeah
yeah

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there was a few obviously
like I was in jail but yeah
there was a couple
of what you said earlier like
I was 24 years old
I played for New Zealand
and I played over 100 in the rail games and I was
24 yeah so
as a front rower
your hot property right yeah
I wouldn't say hot property
come and fresh out of jail but it was like
your property
your property
you're probably
you got a heaps of potential
but you're a door up
you know
you need a little reno you need a bit of work but
yeah
that's
just the situation and to be frank
if I went to jail when I was 33
I definitely wouldn't have had any office
because it would have been it's about
that like I had the potential to come out
the other side
and be a better person but not only that
I had the potential to perform on the field
and to play and
you know do what I always love to do
and what I was really good at which was
to play rugby league so
yeah
yeah so I'm keen to pick up from the dragon
so you signed the two year contract like that must
have been a really
cool moment in this journey and the education
part of it too can you link that
link us up to that part of the journey
yeah so
getting back on my feet at the dragons
all of I got out of jail in

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2015 and January
January the 5th 2015
I think I've played my first game of reserve grade
in May and then I played
reserve grade all the way so I had to meet
all these milestones to
I had to work to get back into the NRL
because it wasn't just the case of
oh he's back now here's a contract
go and play right you had to jump through a few hoops
and there's still a few areas I imagine
yeah and totally because
it goes back to the thing of building up trust again
like oh well you're fucked up before
so we don't trust that you won't do it again
which is
it's normal everybody does it
so
that was all good
built that up and yeah
Mary brought me into her team
and I just trained I ended up being
allowed to train with the first grade squad
and I was playing reserve
grade and I was having fun
and it was a really good
actually
eye-opening experience for me
because I debuted when I was 18
so I didn't really have that
I'm going to do anything that I can
to
I'm 24 but I'm going to
drive two hours a day to training
and then when I played reserve grade
that year I was like man these dudes
like the chances of them
playing is what
drives them to keep coming like
it made me really think
about education, career, business
most of them were teachers
they were really tradies

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and everybody loves to talk about
former athletes
like oh you know
look at them they wasted all their money
or they didn't do anything meaningful
it's like
when you're 18 and you're playing
it's like your single track on that
but when you're
18 and you're not even
making reserve grade team you're like oh
maybe I'll go and do that
I'll just degree and become a teacher
and chip away and then train
and build up and so you've had
your own life and I think
yeah that was really formative
then
at the end of 2015
the NRL allowed me
to come back
the main reason why I wasn't
given
why I wasn't
I guess allowed to
be an official NRL player is because
I had a deportation case hanging over my head
so
I got out of jail in
2015
a lot
of
a law
for deportation changed
in Australia so
you'll probably read in the paper but quite a lot of
people that have been to jail for over
one year in Australia have since been
deported back to New Zealand
that were born in New Zealand and New Zealand citizens
and so I was
on that radar for
for immigration

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in Australia so that
behind the scenes
you know that was
probably more
scarier than jail to be honest because it was like
yeah
it was a very very real chance that I was going to get deported
I had immigration
lawyers and my lawyers were kind of prepping me
to
yeah
to go to the detention centres
and stuff like that
yeah so
you know
Laura's been through a lot man and
yeah put my family through
through a lot of that a lot of uncertainty
and
so
to put that into perspective when I was allowed to play
again and stay it meant that I was staying in Australia
which was I had more
weight you know it was a lot more significant
and I'm allowed to play a game it's like
we were having conversations
in the background like oh
what are we going to do if I get deported
like where we live we'll go to Hamilton
and I could have been a
ambassador down there but
you know
you've got strong grounds
you've got strong grounds to become one
yeah and I don't
ever do pedigree playing cricket I just
I only played cricket once
I never got to bat and I never
got to bowl and I was like oh this
sucks but obviously I was shit
that's why I wasn't bad in all bowling
but
yeah bro it's so

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we went through
a lot of
psychological
times where you just
didn't know the future and how certain
it was in terms of what you could do play
the deportation stuff
so
when I played my first game
it was awesome
Melbourne Storm
down there
and it was just like
I trained really hard
you know I was in good shape
and I just loved being back in there
being in that competitive environment
I think that's what I loved
I've always loved competing
you know I'm real competitive naturally
hard to
get to elite levels of sport if you just
don't have a high level
of competitiveness in you
whether that's loud or internal
whatever but
probably the thing that
I miss the most about league is
the competition challenging myself
against the best players and
I accepted that I was too old like my body
was broken down and
you know
I was like a pack of meat that had
expired but it hadn't been frozen bro so it was time to
you know go and
that's where it is but
mentally that's what I miss it's like
the ability to get
fit, push yourself
being pushed by all those around you
who are in your team
so you compete them with your own teammates to get better

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and then you get the privilege to go
and
test yourself against another team
and then work together and yeah that's probably
the thing I miss about it
but
three awesome years in St George
and we lived in Wollongong
yeah beautiful people
like
a lot of teammates that I have
this is another thing too
just
in general
I don't know if you've ever come across the
rule of 150
I watched the TED talk
someone sent it to me but it's
an anthropologist called Robin Dunbar
who's
he's a British anthropologist so studies animal
behaviour and all this thing but
I'm up with this
model that people can't really
exceed human connection beyond
150 people
called Dunbar's theory
or all of them 50
but I came across that and
you know it goes in this like
5 people really close
and then 15 and you know
way more about your 5 closest friends than
you do about number 20 don't you
just go to that
because you spend more time with them
and that's kind of what a regular
team is like
you connect with some people more than
others like
you're professional by then you're late
so it wasn't like that brotherhood that I had
at the Warriors I had a different

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outlook on life like I still loved it
it was like a team but then it was also
more like business like where
the Warriors it was like
I was just a kid bro it was
that wasn't like my family
we'll be right back after this short break
so
and by the time you got to the
Tigers you did 4 years at the Tigers
1821
you had all of this
learned experience right like by that
stage you're a veteran and you're
a part of the leadership group and you've got
the jail and the youngsters and you can help
the youngsters coming through was that a cool period
yeah bro
so Ireland
signed a few of us to go
to the West Tigers and into
2017 and
you know me and Benny
Martz ended up connecting back up again and
that was cool
so I signed there for 4 years been signed
there for 3 years and
you know it's a good reflection if you go
somewhere with expectations like
you talked earlier soon as like
I played 100 games when I was 22 so
I just had the expectation well
I've got here so I'm definitely
going to get 200 as
you know I want to go for 250 or 300
and we all went
to the Tigers with good expectations
and that was a real
good team in 2018 the year before
I think they won 4 or 5 games
lost
couple of their marquee players came out and recruited
and we won

12 games that year so they went from 5
games it was 7 win turnaround
in one year
and obviously that
year Ivan
you know
there was the going back to
kind of situation which happened
towards the end of the year
so I was a captain there
and then they got
Madge came in
and
we obviously
had
different philosophical views
I learnt a lot of Madge though
you know
I guess when you get two stubborn people
in the room they're not always going to agree
and he was the boss and I was in
and that's what happens in the team
like as a fan or whatever you see
it you go oh
that guy used to be good and now he's not
even playing
my last game of NRL
I played 10
minutes off the bench but I didn't go on
until the 55th
minute
you know so like
that was
my last game of NRL
so I had really fallen off the
like I was starting
I was always a starter because to be
a starting front row in the NRL
and I think
not to just say
you need this to do it but
you have to have a different mentality
like the physical attributes

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go without saying but
to be a starter
it's a different mindset because
more pressure at the start of the game
like first kickoff carry
first tackle
yeah first tackle
you want to be out there
you want to be
a part of it at the start
it's like rocking up to a party
three hours in
straight up like sometimes
when you sit on the bench that's what it feels like
oh you've missed all the fun
you've missed the crack up stories
and you weren't a part of it
for me anyway that's what it's like
especially for me
my personality was like
I always said to any coach
I want to start
whether or not I'm good enough to do it or not
whether I'm better than the other two props that you pick
then that's up to you but
I have the intention like
I want to be on the field first
that's just in my nature
take me into that
you're in the in goal area and
you're receiving
like pissing your pants a little bit later on
but I normally did that before
the first kickoff
actually while we're there now
talk us through that
and then I've got my follow up question as well
yeah look man this
it's crack up to say now but
like
I always
I always played with a lot of injuries so I played with
like medicine like anti-inflammatories

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and all that and I always
played with me like I'm
man of routine but I would always spew up
before every game oh really
yeah and I always used to brush my teeth
and brush my mouth guard just before
I went on so like any of my old teammates
they're like oh this weird dude like brushing his teeth
just before you run out but I always
was whether it was a combination
of the medicine and then obviously
my nerves but I would always have a weak bladder
so like I would always
like just before the
would run out I'd be like oh fuck
and then that game
bro like
the
the ball was gonna get kicked off and like
I had done the old
drop down on the knee like previously
and then you know we at the side
but it was like
the ball was on the tee 40 seconds
before the kickoff so
if I like dropped on the knee right there
everyone would be like oh this dude's wings so I was
just like fuck I
heaps of shit was going through my head like
oh I should have quickly run off but then I missed
the start of the game
and yeah I just couldn't hold it in
did you take it out
or did you just go through the undershorts
yeah just like yeah just
just weed through my pants and
cause it's a solid stream
it's like hiding in broad daylight hey have I got away with this
has anyone seen this
like it's probably
it's paradoxical
like oh he's smart enough to
get into that university and get it

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okay but he's stupid enough to piss his pants
on the field so
it's all part of the story bro
all part of the character but
yeah I think at the time
too bro like
I only played five games that year and I was injured
like as I said before in 2013
was that 13 that season was that the
yeah was that that season with the when you
pissed yourself on the on Sunday
yeah so I wasn't in the best middle
space what I said yeah contextualizing it as well
yeah yeah like in the context of it not to say
you know that's the reason like I just
need to do a person I did and
but to contextualize that
I
I hadn't played because I got a surgery on my
shoulder in like February
so and I was unfit bro and I was
um
I was definitely out of shape I wasn't training
hard I was isolated I wasn't
in the best mental frame and
um
Matt Elliott was the coach and
again you know
I guess he wasn't like a Ivan
to me like he did he didn't bring the best
out of me or I probably wasn't
the best version of myself under him
as well and
um
Sammy Jake got
injured and I was fucking
I was like nearly 130 kilos bro
I was like massive like in the
photo you know well he's a people see me
that well you're not as fat as what you were
when you're playing I'm like yeah
and um so
my discipline wasn't there and

um probably
goes back around on the story but
what I said earlier about always wanting to start
we had like three injuries and
there was no other experience from
always I was not fit but
Matt Elliott came to me and was like
oh we're gonna need you to play
and I was like yeah I'll play I said
but if I play
I start
so that was like kind of my attitude yeah
I was like yeah I believe I can do it
yeah I haven't played much I'm
definitely unfit but mentally I reckon
I can get through 20 minutes but I want to start
cause yeah and
and my my follow up was the mentality
of a front rower before that first
kickoff are you like
like it was in ball rush back at school
like picking the
the biggest guy that you can find and go fuck it
I'm aiming up and I'm coming straight at you
yeah yeah especially when
you're 130 Kigs yeah
yeah you can just pick anyone
I remember that year
cause obviously growing up as a kid like
Sonny Bill was
the man and he was at the roosters that
year that's the year the roosters won it
and I remember we played a game and I was
that big and I was like fuck
I'm just gonna run at him and see
just because
like I just want to feel
what the collision will be like and
yeah bro
winded down
I just played the ball but normally when you get
hit real hard in the midsection
you're just like you're winded

but you gotta try and get up
pretend like it didn't hurt so I played
the ball and then just walked off like
like
yeah but that's
I guess that's the kind of mentality and that's
what people are drawn to aren't they
when they watch Bunty run off the back fence
or players go hard
it's like there's a risk that
they're gonna get smashed well people love it
they love the was it
Jerome hit Webki
Jerome Ropati hit Webki and Webki
gets knocked out in a war like
those kind of
highlight collisions are what people just
absolutely love and I'm fascinated by
yeah that mentality of like this could
fucking hurt a lot but fucking I'm just
gonna go for it like look at Dan Hooker
like he's
he's my favourite UFC fighter I've watched
all of his fights and he's just like a mongrel
he just goes hundies like he's
fought dudes that are like 30 kilos
heavier than him you know look
when he came by the dudes
gets kicked in the head sounds
like he's been hit with a bat broken
case bone and just
broken arm as well broken wrist
broken hand and just doesn't
mental like how else can you
explain that he didn't want to lose that fight
he's just like I'm gonna go all the
way give my best shot
and you know yeah that
that's probably the mentality
that you need to have and
just whether some people say oh he's
crazy or you know why are you gonna run
directly straight at someone like Sunny

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when there's a hole there
like is that your ego
or pride
and the competitiveness too you just
you wanna see curious
you said before
you miss like the mental
side of the competitiveness
of playing I think that's perhaps a good
seg into business because you've got
new challenges now and there's new
things which are challenging your mind
in very different ways and I was
sort of reading up you've got a development
of a 19 lot subdivision where's
that Foxton Beach
and you've got the front row fencing
with Ben Medellino yeah
so now you're a businessman so now you've got
these projects and you're supervising
and there's a whole new skill set which you
have taught yourself we talked about the study
you've done but how are you finding that
side of life I've jumped out of the fencing business
but Ben's still running oh yeah
just
took some hits on the development so
you know
these things happen in business it's like
a 19 lot subdivision
it's probably like running off the back fence
I wouldn't advise to do it but you know
just do it anyway
and yeah that has been fun
it's been challenging doing it
as a joint venture
with
awesome guy Regan's
his name he
he owned their journey block
where I purchased and
we ended up meeting for coffee in
2019

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and connected again
probably just meeting the right person
and our energies matched and he initially
didn't you know want to do
the subdivision to get up because
he didn't have the yeah
he didn't want to do it at that time and then
ended up jumping on so
four years in man we've
learned a lot like
we've never developed anything and
most people will start with
like get a little section
and chop it into two but
that's when all that
most people would let go of the toe rope
there's no planet as well
so if anyone in Wellington or Palmerston wants to buy some sections
you'll hit us up but
yeah that's
from the business too
and I'll touch on this
like with the content or
reading books or
getting knowledge or information from
anywhere that doesn't mean fuck
all unless you use it unless you
like experiment unless you
take some risk unless you
fail and learn
yeah like
fail quickly
learn some shit and the hard way
which business school
is kind of like how
to run a company
unless so how to start a company
like starting a podcast
like what episode are you guys into
136
yeah so like now you got
136 runs on the board like
trying to get your first single like in the

cricket analogy that's the toughest thing
getting off the ground
getting one run on the board
getting two you know hitting
a four here one of the
episodes might be a six like oh me
you know I listen to as he's one
and then I'm like fuck that's good content
like and then you know
so I guess any endeavor
any any business
any entrepreneurial
endeavor any idea project is like
starts with the idea and then
you normally have to just
scrap and figure out how to
I had you guys hit podcast before
like I didn't know what one was really
before Steven kind of sent me one and said listen
to this listen to this part this is
what we're going to do and then we went
and then yeah we went from there yeah
I'm really curious about your thirst
for knowledge was it honed during your
time inside or did you always
have a real interest in
wanting to learn and wanting to know more
about the world yeah bro yeah
so it's always been with you yeah from
from from like
from a young kid
guess I would be that like
annoying kids
oh why do you do that what's that for
why do you put that there
why do you put that table
there instead of there like yeah
I guess why is always like
something that's in my head
because I'm just like
it's serious like I'm
actually I'm just generally curious about
heaps of different shit and

why we do things and
you know why did they build a bridge there
instead of over there or why is the
car park design like that instead of
design differently
it's amazing how many successful people
have had on the podcast and the common
denominator is their thirst to
keep improving and learning and growing
and it's so impressive
there are a few things I don't want to
keep you too long because Laura's probably waiting
but she's waited
up longer
there are a few things I do
want to touch on an important
thing in the dad life
we're sort of touched on some of the
the harder moments of parenthood
you've got a son
who's autistic yeah which
produces its own challenges
but what has that
taught you about yourself
oh man just to be
I guess
more empathetic and more
understanding and not so quick
the judgement of other people's
behaviour you know like
the old classic one
and for kids that
are on the spectrum or people that are on the spectrum
was like oh that kid's naughty
tell them to shut up they're screaming
and my son had a lot of
sensory issues like
hearing and
I was challenging when we travelled
a lot when he was a boy
he didn't speak he was non-verbal for a while
so we learnt like some small sign languages
that means more

and
sign languages they taught us all like
fitness and
oh maybe my boy's not going to speak so
we just got on with it but yeah
that posed a lot of challenges
especially around travel because that's
like a high stress for anyone you know
you go to the airport and it's like oh shit
he's a
he's a people moving and so my son
would you know
kick chairs and
what people would categorise as like
behaving badly
kind of kid and people would say stuff
and control your child and
you know so
what it really taught me was
we don't really understand what's going on
in the mind you know of
and we're trying to understand and then
more so for other people we don't
we don't know what's going on in
their head too and why they're acting that way
and just have a little bit more compassion and not
just Russian and you know hey
be quiet it's like
you don't know if they're having some kind of episode
or probably it's taught me
understanding and not
not just having one idea
having you know
more possibilities like oh they're
just naughty or that's just one
option but there's
quite a lot of other possibilities as well
we were talking before the ep about perspective changes
like I imagine that is just the ultimate
perspective changer of
everything yeah man like
my
my boy used to like

smash his head on concrete and
do a lot of the
stimming behaviour like
look at lights and you know
move his head and
flapping it's called in
to like try and calm himself
down and stuff so like
imagine you see me walking around like
shaking my hands and
moving my head and
it's all good when like you're a baby
but like as you get older he doesn't do it anymore
we went through a lot of therapies
and a lot of things and stuff like that
but yeah just
it's new information so
I guess that same
just curiosity about things
like cool
you know
he's got this
he's got this problem
or he's got this
challenge in his life and
Lara and I have always just
committed ourselves as much as we could
to try and understand it and then facilitate it
it's just I don't really like boxing people
and saying oh he's always going to be
like this or it's like
saying a kid's always going to be naughty
or they'll always be
you know whatever
and so yeah we're just
definitely shifted both of our perspectives
and even more so
all of our family
and then it's kind of like
when you buy a car bro it's like you start noticing
all the other cars that look like your one
and with
issues

on the spectrum
I was an ambassador
for an organisation in Australia called
Aspects Autism Spectrum Australia
which done research
and I don't know the exact
numbers now
but I think
when I was doing some stuff of them
one in 60 people
are affected by autism
so you know you meet 60 people
based on probability
one of them's going to be somewhere
on the spectrum and you know
whether that's high functioning like
Elon Musk has said that he
suffers from or he has Asperger's
syndrome which is
autism on the high functioning
aspects and then
you have
it's so asperg
like any
disability
it's
yeah
it poses
different challenges
for everyone even if they have the same
you know same issues
cause everyone's different
and the other one
just a few words on this
Lara told us it's something you keep quiet about
the volunteering you do
in the community the Taku Wairua
and the Water Boy
you moved back to New Zealand
why do you feel it's so important to give back
what's going on
she must have been listening to my conversation
earlier

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I mentioned it before
I don't know if you want me to go over
it again but
yeah
all of the things
that I've been involved in
obviously like I'm not
I don't have a public social media page
or you know
all that stuff
I like to think
that I do things because
I want to and I care
and I always think
this is one thing I learnt from jail
and
no matter what happens
in your life you always have a choice
Wayne Bennett
the
master coach
he was the coach of
the nights when I went to play at the nights
and I got in trouble in the jail
and he told me no matter your story
like oh they hit me
or they did this you know
story of justification
you always have a choice you can choose to say no
you can choose to say yes you can choose to walk away
you can choose to do whatever you choose to do
and
that's something that
it's kind of like
something I remind myself is like
if I go to a coffee group
I'm going to choose to go there
I'm going to choose to listen
if I'm not ready to go there
then I'll choose to say no
and I think that's what happens a lot in life
is that we fall victim
to a bit of social pressure like

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hey brah I've invited you to my party
you didn't show up so
people would rather just go up
and not really want to be there
ah fuck I've got to go to my mate's party
even though I don't really want to
I'll drop in for five minutes
say hello and then back to her
like to me it's
even though it's social
kind of conformity in a way
it's like if I'm going to go
then I want to be
present in the moment
and give my attention to that space
otherwise just choose to say no
but if you choose to say yes then
you choose
yeah you're not going there
because your mate might get upset
or you know and
it's probably like I didn't really understand
at a time when Wayne said it to me
but very deep and
philosophical kind of
messaging which is like
summed up in a short little phrase
like you always have a choice but
when you reflect on it
it's true like I
often reflect on social situations
and like
you know
would have been easier
just to say no
I hope you do share your story more
because it's such a powerful
narrative of the struggles
and the rock bottom and what you've been through
to be where you are now
so many good messages to pass on
for others that are in those situations
Shay do you've got a couple of

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bits before we wrap up
don't need your handbasin
what a status really
and it was because
you mentioned it
you messaged me directly about it
which was Lara is from Hamilton
yeah Malpho
oh Glenview Malpho
and you mentioned a few good nights at the Outback
which everybody has had
how much time do you spend in Hamilton
and could you lend your
your considerable
status
to the cause
I'd rather be
people said that I'm from Hamilton
rather than Huntley so I'll definitely be here
beautiful things
the other one which Lara sent to us
sorry actually I'll
put a caveat on that before I say yes and agree
what's the requirements
you just don't shit on Hamilton
so like I can't mention that
they don't have a beach
you can mention that
it gets cold but then also hot
I mean you've got a choice
you've got a choice to advocate
you choose to advocate and then we're all good
I love Hamilton
well you're there this morning
my kids are there now
they were with Grandma now
and
Grandma took them out to the base
to watch Spider-Man movie
I'm a dad up here so
Lara's fun
we're all living in the Waikato
in the King Country so

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we spent a lot of time in Tikawari
in Hamilton
one of the reasons why we went to Popmars
because Lara's grandparents used to have a holiday home
over there and we spent a bit of time there
a few people
threw a dart at the map and boom
landed
I'm so glad you said yes
thank you for coming and making the time
people are going to get a lot from this
the vulnerability and sharing the message is so important
I honestly think
we could go for another two hours
we're still out there
so maybe there's room for a part two
but I'll throw to Shea who does the outros
thank you for your vulnerability today
I think it would be easy
to shrink away
and to not want to talk about
the difficult parts and they're not easy to talk about
for sure and particularly when you've got two people
prodding away and trying to pull
some of the pieces apart because
it's a traumatic experience
that you went through and
what I think is really impressive is the lessons
that you learned from it
and then you continue to take forward
particularly your thirst for knowledge
I've learnt a whole bunch of stuff
and you've also given me enough threads
to take some stuff away and to do some research on my own
which I hope people listening to this episode
will also do for themselves
because you are a fountain of knowledge
and you talked about the paradox before
of the guy who pisses his pants
before a game
it's only once
but has got the NBA as well
and I think

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for the uninitiated
they will hold on to that paradox about
he's the buffet rugby league player
without taking the time to listen to the story
and listen to the messages that you drop
and it was encapsulated in a quote
and these are your words from I think 2017
I think it's the best way to summarise this episode
and
you said
the story I have so far is of a young kid
growing up in a country town who was good at rugby league
and made a lot of mistakes along the way
I paid the price to society
for them and I've worked hard to try and improve
my life and to be a better person
for my kids and my partner
whether people want to take motivation from it
and see it as a feel good story, I don't know
hopefully it can impact someone
that if they've done the wrong thing
they can accept the responsibility for it
and know that there will be an opportunity
down the path that will pop up and give the chance
to do the right things
I guess I'm living proof of that
and I want to summarise
the last
two hours that we've spent with you
better than your own words
so thank you very much for sharing your story
and I'm glad Stephen's got a golf partner
over the Kaimais now
yeah for sure if you ever want to come
back out to TP
for sure it's a beautiful club
just to conclude thanks heaps
for having me on
I've popped
my podcast Cherry on here
it's been an amazing experience
and I guess the messages
that anyone will take

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I'm a firm believer like you have a choice
so you can't force people to change
it is what it is
you choose to do it and then you get help
so if my message resonates
with anyone and that's probably what I've kind of
mentioned there
I'm not going to force anyone
or impose my will
and say hey do this because
at work for me that's just not how
we all have the decision
to do different
and you know as I said earlier
you don't arrive at a destination
it's a daily thing
it's a daily battle like mental health
and men's awareness around that
it's something that's dear to me
initiatives in the community
like what Thomas and his team
are doing with the water boy
in Takawairoa reaching communities
changing people's life
being a champion in their life
it's like something
a big event as a 11 year old
that can have a huge impact
creating
teachers, people that are
going to pass their lessons
on from their childhood and
yeah that's kind of
why I'm sharing
my story here, just thought it was appropriate
time and if anyone takes
anything out of it then all the better
for them and life's not
easy and you've got to
have fun, look for people that
can help you through it, so thanks
thanks for having me on, really appreciate it
yeah it's been good, you're good man Russell

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cheers Russell, yeah thanks boys
catch you next week
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the ultimate refreshing taste