

Rabbitohs have real need to Crowe

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by Paul Kent

CALL me a sadist, but rugby league needs more fans like Russell Crowe.

You know the type, fans that not only love the club but sing the team song as well. Like Rusty does whenever the Rabbitohs run out for a home game. Over the loudspeakers.

Most of us can remember back to the time when the Rabbitohs would run on to the park to their traditional hymn, "Glory, Glory To South Sydney", and more than a few have observed since then that now that the club has signed Real Insurance as their major sponsor, the Rabbitohs now run out to the former Russell Morris hit "The Real Thing".

A bold move and it seems we have Crowe to thank for convincing management to make the switch. And we can all thank our lucky stars by appreciating that with no actual track to play, Rusty then handed over a tape of his own recording of the song.

See, these are the sorts of fans rugby league needs more of, fans not only keen to get in the trenches with their team, but who actually insist on it.

Like when the Rabbitohs were behind 24-0 at half-time against Penrith in round six earlier this year, they needed something to get back into the game. Thankfully, my man Rusty recognised that.

So there was no reason for coach Shaun McRae and chief executive Shane Richardson to be surprised when they walked into the dressing room for the half-time break and saw Crowe already there, pacing determinedly.

"What are you doing here?" asked Richardson.

Crowe said he wanted to address the players.

Hey, somebody had to do something. And it's not as if he hadn't already done it before.

When the Rabbitohs were first brought back into the competition Crowe was there for their first official game, the Charity Shield against St George Illawarra, walking from player to player and whispering unknown pearls in their ears while coach Craig Coleman addressed the team from the middle.

Obviously whatever he said was gold, as after a two-year absence, the Rabbitohs drew 20-20 against one of the competition heavyweights.

Certainly it was encouraging enough for Crowe to make it back for the opening game, when he and the late Albert Clift rang the bell to signify South Sydney's official return to the NRL.

It was the Rabbitohs' first game back and, even today, players still wistfully remember the performance incentive Crowe offered moments before the game: "Make the top eight," he told them, "and I'll take you all to the Playboy Mansion at the end of the year."

How can you not be motivated by an opportunity to meet Miss December? Unfortunately for the Rabbitohs, they went down 40-6.

Maybe it wasn't so much Miss December that sidetracked them, but rather Crowe chanting, "We're going to the Mansion, we're going to the Mansion" as the players ran down the tunnel. How many other fans are prepared to go the distance like that?

It was Crowe, remember, who took the Rabbitohs out for dinner one night and then invited them back to his house where he engaged them in a game of knee footy in his lounge room. Bryan Fletcher put him through a wall.

Following last Saturday's upset win over Canberra, McRae acknowledged the great contribution of Crowe saying:

"Russell came into the change rooms and I suppose his presence was felt by everybody."

None more than himself, although not nearly as much, apparently, as it was felt the night before. There was no motivational speech for the players from Crowe. Instead, he had brought along a video he thought they could watch together to get in the proper mood.

"It was a video on his training regime for Cinderella Man," the player said.

See, how many other overweight actors would be prepared to show a video of themselves training as a movie character -- one where they had to lose 20kg to make the part -- in a bid to inspire a room full of professional athletes?

Only my man Rusty, that's how many. The superfan.

Asked what the team thought about the video, the player paused.

"Off the record?" he asked...