

Facility: Junee Correctional Centre
Media: Sunday Telegraph, Sydney, NSW
Published Date: 28 October 2012

Will you beat the Cane Toads

Daley quest the talk of Junee jail



THEY are lost souls, inmates doing time inside the Junee Correctional Centre.

But through the harrowing days and lonely nights, they share a special bond — rugby league. And they all want to ask local hero and new Blues coach Laurie Daley one question ... when are NSW going to beat Queensland?

Daley spent two hours inside the jail on Friday afternoon, talking with inmates about rugby league, racism, religion and his private life.

Dressed in prison-issued green uniforms, the inmates flocked to Daley, each having their own tale about rugby league and wanting to know who will be in the NSW side for next year's series.

The former NSW and Test skipper was invited to help rehabilitate the prisoners.

One told him: "You have made us feel better about ourselves. When we get out, we know we can change."

Daley was nervous and apprehensive when he walked through the centre's X-ray machine just after 3pm, having first been cleared of carrying drugs by sniffer dog Gypsy.

Once inside, he headed down the corridors among the

prisoners but never far from correctional manager and friend Russell McAuliffe.

First stop was the jail's cultural centre, where a group were playing indoor volleyball among the massive murals.

The prisoners stopped playing surrounded Daley. It was a confronting moment. Yet they only wanted to talk footy — a sport which lifts their spirits in a harsh environment.

The questions started: What's happening with the Blues? Is Quade Cooper coming to rugby league? How will James Maloney go at the Roosters? Will Joey Johns be an assistant coach for NSW?

It was like this throughout the two hours.

Cultural centre worker Gerome Brodin said: "Everyone need mentors. They will talk about this day and Laurie Daley for weeks."

As Daley filed out of the room and walked down a long corridor protected by barbed wire, one guy yelled out: "Go get 'em next year. Go Blues."

Another inmate wearing a bandana roared back: "Go Queensland, go Greg Inglis."

Daley was then ushered through four security doors to the visitor centre, where about

40 inmates were waiting.

Daley was introduced by CRL official and mate David Skinner, with most hanging on Lozza's every word.

The Blues coach then throws open the floor to questions. Up go the hands and Daley starts answering them — some are more awkward to handle than others.

One prisoner, sitting at the back of the room, offered us a coffee before claiming to know an inmate who used to play first grade. He claimed rugby league turned its back on criminals.

"I'm a prisoner begging for a second chance. Your code won't let my friend salvage himself," he said.

Daley disagreed, but the question unsettled him.

Another suggested Queensland selected more indigenous players for Origin.

Another asked for a scoop on the team and there were even questions about how Canberra managed to win the 1989 grand final in extra time against Balmain.

The most unusual question came from an elderly gentleman seated near the front of the room. "Laurie, tell us about your faith."

He answered: "I'm a Christian and my kids are being raised as Christians. We go to church regularly. I am not a Christian who forces religion on to other people."

"But it is part of me and was part of my family as we grew up."

"Everyone falls back on their belief. It's important to do what you think is right — not what others think is right."

McAuliffe then explained the impact of Daley's visit.

"Rugby league gives them an interest. It is a sport they look forward to each weekend," McAuliffe said.

"When one of their heroes turn up like Laurie, it is a big thing to meet him in the flesh. You go into their cells and see Roosters towels and doonas. They are fanatical about their footy. Laurie is such a great role model. Even though these

blokes have done the wrong thing, they still respect that."

As Daley winds up his talk, some rush for autographs. One guy yells: "Will you come back and visit us if NSW win?"

Daley replies: "I will go everywhere if we win!"



Laurie Daley meets inmates at the Junee Correctional Centre this week (left and above) and (bottom) giving an address to prisoners at the facility
Pictures: Brad Newman



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