

# THE GRAEME LANGLANDS STORY



EXCLUSIVE  
by  
Philip Jenkins

"GRAEME, meet Billy Smith." The two youngsters shook hands briefly and a happy night continued.

But in that quick handshake was forged the beginnings of the most remarkable Rugby League partnership of them all.

Chang and Little Billy. Throw in all the great partnerships you can think of: Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Crosby and Hope, Bonnie and Clyde, roast beef and yorkshire pudding, scotch and dry — and this one matched them all.

It was 1962 and the men of St. George were celebrating yet another premiership win, and receiving their payout for a year's hard work.

Saints had just signed Graeme Langlands from Wollongong. And not long before he had celebrated his 21st birthday.

"Come up and meet the boys," said Saints secretary Frank Facer to Langlands.

So the shy youngster from Wollongong made the trip

## PART TWO

up the coast and met the men with whom he was to make League history.

Not long before Changa laughed when St. George offered him £800 to join them.

But it was a laugh of total disbelief.

Chang, you see, had never earned more than £50 a season before playing football.

"I couldn't believe it," he says today. "It seemed too much money."

So Chang signed, bought a house in the heart of St. George territory and with his mother Zell, moved to Sydney.

The night he signed the Langlands career almost ended before it began. The injury problem that was to haunt his career reared its head again when he had a few beers too many and

accidentally thumped his arm through a glass door in a Wollongong pub.

Fifty two stitches and several hours later doctors at Wollongong hospital had him patched up.

A centimetre deeper and Langlands may never have played football again.

That next year, 1963, Langlands quickly teamed up with Billy Smith and formed a close mateship with the amazing Johnny "Chook" Raper.

It was quite a trio. Great footballers all — and now, in their mature years, each one admits he was no angel in those days.

The Langlands-Smith partnership is something to behold. It began in the premiership-winning team of '63 when Chang was fullback and Smith a centre — 12 seasons later it's going just as strong.

Today the rapport between Langlands and Smith is absolutely uncanny.

If Smith puts a little kick over the top you can bet your life Langlands will be the first man on the spot. They keep each other going.

"Would Chang still be playing if Smith wasn't still there?"

"Probably not," says Langlands.

Raper and Smith both feature in Langlands' list of greatest players. Raper, who along with Frank Facer has probably had the greatest



The Australian team take a look at Wembley in 1963. How many faces can you pick?

influence on Chang's career, is at the top. Then in a bunch he rates Gasnier, Provan and Smith. "All different, but all great in their own way," says Chang.

In late September 1963 the young Langlands, after a mighty season in which he scored 15 tries from fullback, won a place in the Kangaroo team. He was picked as a winger but played only 15 minutes in the position on the entire tour.

He quickly gravitated to the centres and became Reg Gasnier's partner; in England they still talk about that combination as the greatest of them all.

The biggest thrill in Langlands' entire football life came in early November on that tour. He was picked to play centre for Australia in the First Test at the magnificent Wembley Stadium.

Before the match, with his hands shaking and knees knocking from the pre-match nerves which still haunt him today, Chang met the Duke of Edinburgh.

He went out and played the game of his life, scoring a try and kicking 5 goals to spearhead a great Australian victory.

"I'll never forget that match; it was a tremendous experience," says Langlands today.

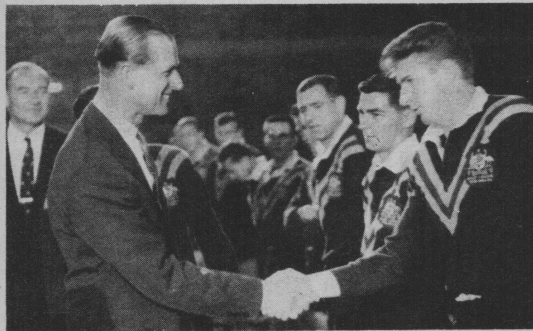
That was his first Test. Today the score stands at 34 tests, 11 World Cup and World Series matches and seven overseas tours. Looking back over all the tours Langlands rates that 1963 team as the greatest of them all.

With his fiery, win-at-all-costs play on that tour Langlands became an arch villain with the English crowds. It was the start of a love-hate relationship which still exists today.

But in 1963 Chang had the last laugh. Australia won the Ashes in England and France and he flew home to Australia with a bag of 201 points, from 17 tries and 78 goals.

The Rugby League world lay at his feet.

**NEXT WEEK:** The greatest regret in Chang's life.



ABOVE: The Duke of Edinburgh shakes hands with Langlands before the Australia-Great Britain Test at Wembley in 1963. BELOW: Langlands doing his favorite thing — beating a Pom. A youthful Ken Irvine in the background.



A rest from the tour and Langlands joins his mates for a dip.

