

THE GRAEME LANGLANDS STORY



PART THREE

GRAEME Langlands, world record-breaking footballer, like all of us, regrets some of the decisions he has made.

And now in moments of quiet reflection Chang would probably admit that the worst decision he ever made was to make himself available again for representative football this year.

"I wish to hell that I had stayed out," a bitter Langlands said midway through the recent World Series.

At the time Langlands' morale was at its lowest.

Criticism of his form — when playing with injuries — and of his selection in the Australian team to play New Zealand had stung him deeply.

A moody, downcast Langlands after the match against New Zealand revealed that he was on the verge of quitting representative football — finally and irrevocably.

I asked him how close he was to dropping out that week.

"I was close alright... bloody close," he said.

"I was sick to death of the constant 'bagging' I was getting from men who had urged me to make myself available in the first place."

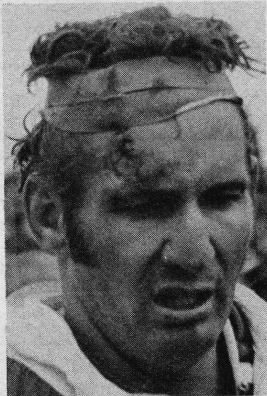
That week probably marked the first time in 13 years with St. George that Chang turned his back on advice from his long-time mate Frank Facer.

Facer advised Langlands to hang up his representative boots.

"You have nothing to gain and everything to lose," he told the great fullback.

Others urged him to stay on. "You can't do half a job, you must keep going," they said.

Chang did. Whether he continues to make himself available for the second half of the



An injured Chang swathed in bandages.

World Series is anyone's guess; even Langlands can't answer that one.

Chang's bitter feeling in that week reflected the deep nature of the man.

Introspective and moody at times he can be charming company at others — a man who takes a real delight in discussing the subject he knows best, Rugby League.

The sensitive and perceptive pen of the great Rugby League writer Tom Goodman probably summed him up best of all.

Goodman described Langlands as: "... this reticent man; this introvert who has been called surly."

Most people in Rugby League probably now wish that Langlands had stuck to his decision of last year and retired from representative football after that epic performance in the Third Test.

What a career it had been... and what an ending that Test match produced.

No one at the SCG that day will forget the emotion which ran through the crowd as they chanted his name: "Chang, Chang, Chang."

It was a fairytale ending to a fairytale career.

That day, like the day of his first Test so many years

before, Chang scored 13 points against England.

A battalion of script writers couldn't have hoped for a better ending.

Those 13 points took the total to 104 against England; Graeme Langlands, the boy from Wollongong, stood as the first man in the 68 years of Test history to top 100 in Australia-England games.

Today he also stands as the only man ever to appear in six Test series against England.

Yet after all that, Chang came back — and now he regrets it.

The much-publicised night of trouble at the Australian team's Brisbane hotel added to his worries in the lead-up to the World Series.

Reports of larrikinism and alleged racial insults by members of his team hit the headlines.

"They were small incidents blown up out of all proportion," said an angry Langlands.

"League players seem to be targets for all the 'knockers'.

"From what I've heard, some other touring Australian sporting teams make League players look like a bunch of choirboys.

"But you never read a word about them."

Chang of course had his share of troubles as a hot-headed young fellow on those early tours.

In early 1968 he and Billy Smith were fined their full tour bonuses for alleged misconduct on the '67 Kangaroo tour — the 'Man in the Bowler Hat' tour.

A mature Langlands was later to admit: "We were no angels... that's for sure.

"But the behaviour on that tour was much better than it had been in '63.

"In 1967 we were treated like second class citizens; we stayed in a hotel at Ilkley with rats running around the lounge and stairs."

Six years later Langlands was captain-coach of the 1973 Kangaroos.

They stayed in an old, but elegant hotel and came back with the Ashes — and with a reputation as the best-behaved of all recent touring teams.

It seems to back up the Langlands philosophy: "Treat Rugby League teams like first class citizens and they'll act accordingly."

Today, with seven tours, magnificent memories and enough injuries to keep St. Vincent's Hospital busy for



Expert trainer Alf Richards attends to a Langlands back injury during a Test match.

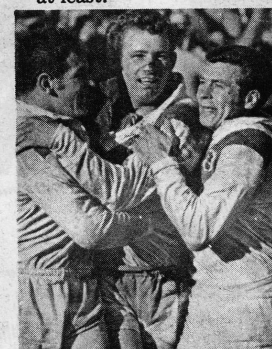
Chang is in the twilight of his remarkable career.

With his wife Lynne, daughters Jacqueline, 8, and Monique, 4, and Aruma the dog, Langlands lives in a stylish, two-storey home at Sylvania.

Rugby League bought him the house.

Rugby League also bought him the brewery truck which will continue to make him a good living when his football days are over.

Langlands will play one more year with St. George — at least.



A happy Langlands rejoices with Barry Beath (left) and Billy Smith after a St. George try.

After that? "I'd like to give it a go as a non-playing coach," he says.

"If that's not successful I would like to go into the administrative side of Rugby League.

"The game has been good to me. It has helped me see the world and helped me on my way in life. I want to put something back in."

The injuries of such a long, gruelling career so far have not reacted against Chang.

The worst was a terrible groin muscle tear which required a pain-killer almost every match in one season — and then miraculously disappeared overnight.

"Physically the injuries might come against me later in life... but it's still all been worth it."

The interview over, Chang rose to leave.

"Would you do it all again?", I asked.

Langlands smiled: "Most definitely"... and walked away to join his team-mates, some of whom were kids in short pants when this most remarkable of Rugby League players first ran onto the field.

You can quiz Chang

YOU have just read an exclusive three-part story on the life of Graeme Langlands.

Yet, there is still much about Langlands which hasn't been written.

Rugby League Week is giving you the opportunity to ask Graeme Langlands a question.

Langlands has agreed to answer your questions, as long as they are not too personal.

You may like to ask him a question about his own career or his opinion of a particular player or incident.

records or for photos or autographs.

Keep the questions short. Langlands will answer them in Rugby League Week in two weeks' time.

Address your questions to, 'Chang,' Rugby League Week, 15 Boundary St., Rushcutters Bay 2011.

NEXT WEEK:

You've read about Chang *The Magic Dragon*. We will bring you Stewart Calder's penetrating story on *The Contenders* next week in



Behind every champion footballer there is a champion official...