



'Chang' — the magic Dragon

This photo of Graeme Langlands probably depicts the St. George champion at his best. It was taken when St. George were at their mightiest. Those were the days . . .

of Wollongong. Rugby League, surfing, basketball . . . they all had a place in the life of the young Langlands.

As an 18-year-old he represented Illawarra at basketball. Around the same age he was showing the competitive spirit in the surf, winning musical flag, belt and surf events for Wollongong club.

But it was always going to be Rugby League. For a time his mother Zell resisted — but Graeme kept bringing home football trophies — and she relented.

The accidents and injuries which were to become an unwelcome part of his life were with him even in those early days.

Once he ran a nine inch long wood splinter into his back — and needed hospital treatment to get it out. At 11 he suffered a bad injury to his left hand and for a time they thought he might lose it. Then he needed a cartilage operation after injuring his knee in his first year with Wollongong Rugby League club.

One day in 1961 when torrential rain sent floodwaters swirling around Wollongong, Langlands almost lost his life. He was a member of a flood relief party from Wollongong surf

managed to grab him by one arm as he threatened to make a rescue attempt in the dangerous waters on the outskirts of the town. But Chang, the greatest survivor of them all, survived.

In 1961 Langlands played his first representative game for Illawarra. The brash teenager with the duck-tail hair cut by that time had firmly established himself in the Wollongong team at fullback.

A good player named Ellis Bridge had been switched to the wing to make room for Chang. Wollongong knew

they had a winner — but they didn't know how long they could hang on to him.

Sydney clubs were already buzzing about the young fullback from the south coast — and another young fullback from the coalfields named Les Johns.



In 1962 Johns was named Country Firsts fullback and Langlands was in Country Seconds.

But fate took a hand. Johns dropped out with injury and the fresh-faced

kid from Wollongong got the call-up. The record books tell the rest of the story.

Country, with the skilful Tony Paskins as skipper, skittled the City stars 18-8.

Chang had arrived. That night, flushed with success he had Country team-mate Ron Hopper stopped at St. George Leagues club — the old St. George Leagues club — to have a couple of celebratory beers.

They were on their way back down the coast. Standing a stone's throw along the bar was Frank "Fearless" Facer, the eagle-eyed St. George secretary. After a while Facer came over and talked about the game with Langlands and Hopper over a couple of middies.

It was innocent talk; at that stage Saints didn't want a fullback. They had Brian Graham, a cool customer who was doing the job they wanted.

One month later Graham was transferred to Korea in his job.

Suddenly Saints needed a fullback.

Langlands, the freakish, side-stepping goalkicking kid from the south coast was the one they settled on.

Soon after, one of the most remarkable player-club associations in the history of Rugby League began.

NEXT WEEK: Raper, Langlands, Smith — why they clicked OFF the field.



Chang was a champion basketball player on the south coast. How

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