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‘NO’ to racism

Dean Widders draws on experience to help
NRL role models stand strong in culture

FORMER SYDNEY ROOSTERS AND RABBITOHS’ STAR DEAN WIDDERS IS MORE AT HOME OFF THE FIELD THESE DAYS, TALKING WITH NRL PLAYERS AS THE LEAGUE’S WELFARE AND EDUCATION OFFICER. HE LOOKS AFTER THE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PLAYERS, HELPING THEM THROUGH RELOCATION AND BEHAVIOURAL ISSUES, BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM AND SHOWING THEM HOW TO STAND STRONG IN CULTURE.

Of course, Dean’s been there and done that, having played at the elite level of NRL since he was drafted into the Roosters at the age of 17 in 1996, the year he also captained the Aboriginal side. He knows first-hand what it’s like to move from the bush to the city, to have that pressure on you as an Aboriginal person playing world-class footy, and to keep your feet on the ground at a time when stardom can sway a young head.

The NRL has put Dean in a position where he can draw on his experiences and give back to young up-and-coming players. He helps them make that transition from the everyday world to the NRL world where the pressures of stardom and being a role model as well as being an Indigenous player can weigh heavily.

“I do everything from educational camps, through to leadership, aspiration building, employment, self-esteem and one-on-ones. A big thing is relocating from the bush to

the big city and coping with the demands of being an Indigenous role model,” Dean says.

“The guys playing now are doing tremendous things, great things. You look at someone like Greg Inglis and not only is he doing great things for the game, he’s also doing fantastic things for the community.”

Racism in sport is not uncommon for players and it’s an issue that Dean feels strongly about. He played back in the late ‘90s through to 2011, before racism in sport was largely outed. It’s these experiences that help him counsel the players on how to react to something which “cuts deep”.

“I tell them it’s not acceptable and it’s not right. It’s not part of the game or everyday life. It’s a terrible thing for First Nations’ people because it’s rubbing salt into wounds because of the trauma of our history. I tell them to make a stand,” he says.

“But it’s the way you go about it. Don’t fight violence with violence. People who think it’s just name-calling have to understand that this is our culture, our bloodline and there’s a deep history [to the hurt] in this country. It hurts.

“So I tell them to stand up, be proud, educate people and that the old excuses aren’t good enough.”

The NRL is a leader when it comes to supporting Indigenous communities across the nation – and developing young kids through to becoming professional players, according to Widders. It’s come a long way since he started out in the sport, and it’s an environment he feels very at home in when it comes to supporting Indigenous players.

“The game is more supportive now and we are reaching into social media. If people step out of line, they lose their membership. Our players are learning quickly, too. I feel more comfortable walking around in an NRL club than walking down the streets,” he said.



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STAY STRONG

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“ I tell them [racism] is not acceptable and it's not right. It's not part of the game or everyday life. It's a terrible thing for First Nations' people because it's rubbing salt into wounds because of the trauma of our history. I tell them to make a stand. **”**

So how did Widders deal with racism on and off the field when he was playing.

Well, he stood up and simply said he wasn't going to tolerate it. "People learn then," he says.

These days Dean is organising camps with the NRL to help players strengthen their self-esteem and develop leadership skills. He wants the players to "feel comfortable in their own skin", and represent what they are, their culture and identity.

He's also an ambassador for Rugby League One Community, which is a program the NRL runs for young people that aims to use Rugby League to make a positive difference in people's lives.

Since its inception, One Community has grown into the largest and most comprehensive community-relations program in Australian sport. It uses high-profile current and ex-NRL players to spread health and education messages to schools, assist charitable causes to raise thousands of dollars annually and supports and recognises special individuals in the game.

Dean is also an ambassador for R U OK? – the suicide-prevention organisation that focuses on talking about problems and asking for help.

"I've worked in remote communities and I know that you need to ask for help, look out for each other and have those conversations about feeling down," he says.

"Our people don't talk about their feelings but it takes a strong man to talk about their problems. Social media and cyberbullying is a big problem with our kids also."

Dean plans on doing what he does best now – getting out and helping young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to stand strong and proud. He'd also like to see more Indigenous people in the administration of NRL – in the executive and other roles.

"We need more black faces there... I love helping our people, and whether that's one or two kids or hundreds, I want to see better outcomes for our people."

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Ex- Roosters, Parramatta and Rabbitohs star forward Dean Widders is the NRL's Welfare and Education Officer. Some of his roles include supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players to adjust to playing in the NRL, working through relocation issues and helping them to build self-esteem and stay strong in their culture.

He is in a position where he can draw on his own experiences to support younger players coming into the NRL, especially when they are faced with racism on the field. His message is to stand up against racism, be proud of your cultural identity and educate people about the impact that racism can have on players.

ACTIVITY 1

BUILDING READING SKILLS



- skimming and scanning for information
- reading headings, text boxes and pictures
- reading for meaning
- making connections between the text and your own

There are three levels of comprehension questions:

- Literal** The answer is located in one sentence.
- Inferred** You need to make links between sentences and graphics (such as illustrations, maps and tables) and what you already know.
- Applied** The answer is in your background knowledge, what you already know or feel.

1 What makes Dean Widders a good choice for the role of NRL Welfare and Education Officer? (inferred)



2 What is the purpose for this text? (applied)



3 Explain how Dean Widders' role can help make Aboriginal players stronger. (applied)

4 Evaluate the effectiveness of this text in achieving its overall aims. (applied)

ACTIVITY 2

LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS – SPELLING

1 The spelling mistakes in these sentences have been underlined. Write the correct spelling for each word in the box.

He can support players through behaviorial issues.

It helps players to transishon into the NRL.



ACTIVITY 2

LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS – PUNCTUATION

1 Write these three sentences correctly, correcting spelling and adding the missing punctuation.



the game is more supportive now and we are reaching into
 media if people step out of line they loose they're membership
 players are learning quickly two dean widders said

ACTIVITY 4

WRITING AN EXPOSITION

1 TOPIC – More Australians need to say 'No' to racism.



An Exposition is a type of argument that states one point of view about a topic.
 (A Discussion argues **both** sides of an issue.)

Here's how most Expositions are structured:

Argument type	Social purpose	Stages	Phases
Exposition	argues one point of view about an issue	<p>Thesis – statement of your point of view (Introduction)</p> <p>Arguments – points (Your opinions)</p> <p>Restatement (Conclusion)</p>	<p>preview all the points</p> <p>evidence statistics quotes examples elaborations</p> <p>review all the points and sum up</p>

TOPIC – More Australians need to say 'No' to racism.

Brainstorm your ideas.

Write an EXPOSITION to convince a reader of your opinion.

Think about:

- examples, statistics, elaborations and other evidence to support your ideas.

Remember to:

- research your topic and plan your writing.
- choose your arguments carefully.
- start with an attention-grabbing introduction.
- state your arguments clearly.
- give reasons and examples for your arguments.
- write in sentences.
- use words that connect your ideas cohesively (to begin, next, in addition to, furthermore, in conclusion...).
- use a new paragraph for each new idea.
- choose your words carefully to convince a reader of your opinion; use persuasive language – rhetorical questions, high modality, emotive language, repetition, data and statistics etc.
- pay attention to your spelling and punctuation.
- check and edit your writing so that it is clear for a reader.

ACTIVITY 5

CREATING A POSTER

- 1 Posters are a powerful way of getting a message across to an audience. Create a poster to illustrate your arguments from Activity 4.**

Five features of an effective poster:

- grab the attention of the intended audience – use dramatic graphics, visual images and photos or pose a dramatic question.
- keep words to a minimum.
- use a slogan that readers will remember.
- use dramatic or symbolic colours.
- keep it simple so the message stands out.