

SPORT



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RUGBY WALLABIES v LIONS

THE LYNAGH FIRE



Photo: Getty Images

Four years ago, Tom Lynagh made a huge decision. It's the reason he will line up against the Lions tomorrow instead of potentially playing for them. **JONATHAN DRENNAN PAGES 40-41**

McDonald's
Ashes hint
for Konstas
and UsmanCRICKET
Tom Decent

Kingston: Australia's coach Andrew McDonald has all but confirmed opener Usman Khawaja will retain his spot for the first Ashes Test, despite making one century in his past 44 innings, but admits Sam Konstas will have to prove himself in the Sheffield Shield.

Meanwhile, former Test captain Ricky Ponting has said he thought Australia's top three in the batting line-up would remain the same for the Ashes. After a series whitewash over the West Indies in three low-scoring Tests, McDonald said Australia did not think pitches would be so bowler-friendly in the Caribbean.

After making a duck and six at Lord's in the World Test Championship final, Khawaja finished the West Indies series with 117 runs from six innings at an average of 19.5.

He compiled a brilliant 232 against Sri Lanka this year in Galle, but outside of that, the 38-year-old hasn't passed 90 in more than two years as a Test opener. His average across nine Tests last year was 25.93.

"We see him playing a part during the summer," McDonald, who did not speak to Australian reporters after the series sweep, said on SEN Radio.

"He's got great experience [and] we still feel he's moving well. It feels like I'm having a repeat conversation around David Warner. We know what we're getting there. We feel that will match up well against England. Then it will be about the output of runs. Those runs weren't here and there's a reason why those runs weren't here. It was incredibly difficult."

Konstas' case is less convincing after a return of just 50 runs from six innings at an average of 8.33, including two ducks.

The 19-year-old is expected to play at least three Sheffield Shield matches for NSW before the first squad is picked ahead of the Ashes opener in Perth on November 21.

"We're open to all options in terms of the way we're going to stack that up [opening spot]," McDonald said. "With that comment, it's probably going to create even more debate as to what's happening, but we see [Konstas] as a player we use going forward. It's just a matter of when."

"I think it was a difficult time for Sam. He'll take away some information that will accelerate his growth. Him playing Test cricket I think has been a massive positive. I don't think anyone is damaged by being exposed to Test cricket. I think it leaves him where

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AFL

Wing and a
prayer as
Swans aim
for miracle

Even perfection in the run to the finals might not be enough to get Sydney home. **PAGE 39**

RTS manager confirms
interest in rebel compLEAGUE
Michael Chammas

The manager of Warriors star Roger Tuivasa-Sheck has confirmed his client is considering a lucrative defection to breakaway rugby competition R360, and is also backing Knights star Kalyn Ponga to make the switch.

The *Herald* this week reported that both Tuivasa-Sheck and Ponga are considering switching to the 15-man code.

The latest threat to the NRL comes in the form of a reported Saudi Arabian-backed rebel rugby union competition that aims to have 200 players signed by the end of September to begin a global circuit tournament from next year.

Tuivasa-Sheck's agent Bruce Sharrock has close ties to the R360 competition and confirmed that his client is giving strong consideration to signing a deal that would

earn him more than \$1 million a season after his Warriors contract expires at the end of 2026.

The 32-year-old, who is on about \$550,000 at the Warriors next year, still has one more year on his deal but is set to almost double his salary in the twilight of his career if

'It's an option that we're genuinely looking at.'

Agent Bruce Sharrock

the breakaway competition gets off the ground.

"We've explored what is a developing competition called R360," Sharrock said. "It's been in the making for 12-18 months. Roger comes off his current NRL contract in 2026, and as part of that

planning, I threw this in front of him and asked if he had any interest in this option. He said 'why wouldn't I?'. I've always encouraged all my players to look at all options, and that's where we are at right now."

"[With] the relationship that I hold with every club, and the Warriors in particular, transparency is key. They are aware that it's an option that we're genuinely looking at. That's not to discount that we could look at an extension with the Warriors or another rugby league side, for that matter."

The competition is yet to get off the ground and needs to hit three major triggers to secure the private equity and reported Saudi-Arabian funding to make it a reality.

The first trigger is to have the franchises purchased and legally drafted. The second requires the confirmation of a broadcast partner, **Continued Page 43**

'Heart of a lion': Old mentors declare Lynagh

Jonathan Drennan

In a parallel world, Wallabies five-eighth Tom Lynagh could have been preparing for the first Test in Brisbane in the red of the British and Irish Lions.

Four years ago, Lynagh had a life-changing choice to make. He could stay in England and join the Harlequins academy or move to the Queensland Reds, where his father Michael was a legend.

At Harlequins, four years above him was a generational talent, Marcus Smith who had nailed down the No.10 jersey. Lynagh moved to Australia and will start against the Lions, with Smith poised to come off the bench at Suncorp Stadium.

Former Ireland five-eighth and director of rugby at Epsom Col-



Work ethic: Wallabies five-eighth Tom Lynagh. Photo: Getty Images

lege, Paul Burke, watched the development of Lynagh throughout his time at the elite English boarding school. Burke is not surprised at Wallabies coach Joe Schmidt's decision to throw Lynagh into the pressure cooker of Lions Test after just three caps. "What I liked about him was that despite his di-

minishing figure, he was tenacious, he had the heart of a lion and he would not shirk a tackle, he would stand in the way of bigger opponents and had a load of courage," Burke said. "When you've got that mindset and with the talent that he already had, I knew he was destined for big things."

At Epsom College, Lynagh was known for his humble personality, set against his reputation as an elite athlete in rugby, soccer and cricket. But rugby was always Lynagh's first love and in his final year at school in 2021, Lynagh captained Epsom College in a COVID-affected year.

Lynagh and his teammates were unable to play a full season, but Burke watched the young playmaker spend hours working on his craft.

"He would often go out on his own and just kick balls for hours, just to develop his skills, he was always wanting to get better," Burke said. "He also knew he had to physically work on his development like strength and conditioning, but there was no doubt in his footballing ability."

Lynagh's move to Queensland

ready for toughest test

was not without risk. Epsom College had a close relationship with Harlequins and had consistently provided the London club with professional players. In England, Lynagh was another talented player trying to make his way; in Brisbane, he carried the name of a legend.

Mick Heenan was Lynagh's first coach at the University of Queensland Colts and later worked with him as an attack coach at the Reds.

"When he came in, he was quiet, pretty underdeveloped physically and small, a blond kid and you thought butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, but also a great kid," Heenan said. "You could also tell he was self-assured about his talent as well and you've seen that this year with the way he's played for the Reds. I think you've seen him coming of age as a professional player."

Like Burke, Heenan had no doubts about Lynagh's ability or courage. Lynagh then and now takes the ball extremely flat at the defensive line, essentially sacrificing himself physically to allow teammates into the game. "I thought definitely he had the makings of a pro player, but he had a lot of development to go through to get to where he's at now," Heenan said.

"He had to learn a lot about how to physically and mentally prepare for games at that level."

Heenan will be watching the first Test in Brisbane, while Burke will be up early in Epsom to cheer on his former playmaker. "It's obviously a massive ask, but I think he can [do well], he's got the raw material there, he's got good people around him and he's been coached well," Heenan said.