

155

**PAGES OF
QUALITY
ANALYSIS**

THE PUNTERS'

guide to the

2012

NRL

SEASON

- ★ ALL THE LATEST TEAM INFORMATION WITH COMPLETE SQUAD LISTINGS FOR EACH CLUB
- ★ DETAILED BETTING INFORMATION FROM THE 2011 SEASON INCLUDING ANALYSIS OF HEAD-TO-HEAD, LINE AND TOTAL POINTS BETTING FOR EACH CLUB AND THE NRL AS A WHOLE
- ★ THE THOUGHTS AND PREMIERSHIP PRICES OF AUSTRALIA'S TOP RUGBY LEAGUE GAMBLER AND FORMER PUNTING ACE GURU MR RUGBY
- ★ AN IN-DEPTH AND ORIGINAL STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF ALL 16 TEAMS' RECRUITMENT, POSITIONAL AND COACHING ASSESSMENT AND DRAW EVALUATION FOR EVERY CLUB
- ★ PREDICTIONS AND BETTING ADVICE FOR THE 2012 SEASON **BY NICK TEDESCHI**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Glossary of Terms	7
2011 Betting Analysis	11
Brisbane Broncos	15
Canberra Raiders	24
Canterbury Bulldogs	33
Cronulla Sharks	42
Gold Coast Titans	50
Manly Sea Eagles	59
Melbourne Storm	67
New Zealand Warriors	84
Newcastle Knights	76
North Queensland Cowboys	93
Parramatta Eels	101
Penrith Panthers	109
St George-Illawarra Dragons	116
South Sydney Rabbitohs	124
Sydney Roosters	132
Wests Tigers	140
Forecast 2012 Premiership Ladder	148
Appendix A: Against the Spread Records for 2011	149
Appendix B: Total Points Records for 2011	151
Appendix C: Blue Chip Players	153
About Nick Tedeschi	154
Acknowledgements	155

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Punters' Guide to the 2012 NRL Season, the second Punters' Guide after plenty of support was given in the first year. The aim of this guide is to provide a thorough analysis of each club, offering in-depth breakdowns of how all sixteen teams shape up, how they are likely to perform, their strengths and weaknesses and most importantly for punters, what kind of betting opportunities each present.

And as is the case every year, there are always opportunities available and there is always value to snap up.

I could not be more pleased to have Mr Rugby on board. He is widely regarded as one of the top rugby league punters Australia-wide, having reached renown as the rugby league analyst at Punting Ace where his work became that of legend. Mr Rugby has been an NRL bookmaker and punter for many years and his thoughts must always be listened to.

This year we are also lucky enough to get the thoughts of head bookmaker at Flemington Sportsbet Jason Sylvester. Jason is a rugby league guru who has a profound knowledge of the betting game and knows odds better than anyone. Take note of his comments.

The Punters' Guide to the 2012 NRL Season is a tremendously useful resource for punters, from professionals to those who prefer just a single weekend multi and even those who are just simply in love with league and want all the latest information on their team.

Indeed, for those who are less enthralled by the prospect of a season-long duel with rugby league bookmakers but still have a competitive streak which needs to be sated, this guide still offers plenty – be it advice on teams and trends to follow which assists you in taking out first prize in your office tipping competition, or player rankings, which may help you to form a dominant online fantasy football squad in one of the many competitions on offer these days via the NRL, Fox Sports, The Daily Telegraph and other websites.

This year the guide is following a similar style to last year with a few new additions, the most interesting being the inclusion of the Blue Chip Player List. Rugby League is a team game but it is the stars that have the most impact on the outcome of a team's fortunes over the course of a season. We identify the top players at each position and then give them the label of blue chip. You may be surprised at how many – or how few- your team does have.

The 2012 season shapes as one of the most open in memory with bookmakers and punters alike unable to settle on a pre-season favourite with analysts able to put a line through very few teams.

One of the reasons behind such openness heading into 2012 is the number of coaching changes, with seven clubs – almost half the league – hiring new coaches for the upcoming season.

The defending premiers have a new coach with club legend Geoff Toovey taking over from Des Hasler. Toovey inherits a roster with few changes from the premiership team with the expectations high on the Northern Beaches that the Sea Eagles will once again be around the mark.

Hasler, of course, controversially left Manly only weeks after the premiership victory to sign with Canterbury. He initially inked a deal to start in 2013 but after a fortnight of madness, Hasler was sacked and immediately moved to Belmore. Canterbury have been in desperate need of an experienced disciplinarian and Hasler fits the mould perfectly. His fondness for sports science and Canterbury's big bank account has led to even more excitement among the Canterbury faithful.

Astonishingly enough, the New Zealand Warriors, runners-up in 2011, also have a new coach. Former Kiwi international coach and Leeds premiership-winning mentor Brian McClennan takes over a team full of promise with the heat right on the rookie NRL boss from the get-go.

Ivan Cleary, the man who guided the Warriors to the decider, is now in charge of Penrith. Identified by Phil Gould as the man to guide the Panthers through a rebuilding period, Cleary will be given plenty of time to make his mark at the foot of the mountains.

The two Grand Final coaches from last season will meet in round one – Penrith against Canterbury at CUA Stadium.

After learning at the feet of Craig Bellamy and then having an immediate impact at Wigan, Michael Maguire was perhaps the most sought-after rookie coach in the off-season and landed at South Sydney, a club bereft of success over the last quarter-century. The smart money is on Maguire proving himself worthy of an NRL coaching job.

And, of course, there is Wayne Bennett, one of the all-time greats, who has shifted to Newcastle after three seasons and a title with St George-Illawarra. The seven-time premiership winner has taken Darius Boyd with him and has Newcastle at the top of the board with a lot of bookmakers.

Taking Bennett's place at St George-Illawarra is Steve Price, with the rookie coach under immediate pressure to keep the recent success of the club going.

Four coaches are right on the hot seat or, in the case of Canberra's David Furner, should be. Furner, Parramatta's Stephen Kearney, Cronulla's Shane Flanagan and the Roosters' Brian Smith will all need to find results in 2012.

Furner has done a dreadful job at Canberra, but with a contract for the next three seasons and unwavering board level support unrelated to team performance, there are no obvious signs that Furner should be worried about his job.

Kearney is signed until 2013 but the Eels fired Daniel Anderson in his second season after he guided them to the Grand Final in his first. Parramatta is a club not renowned for patience and with a poor season forecast, Kearney may find himself in trouble.

It is Flanagan and Smith, however, who are the two most likely to be fired if results don't come immediately. Both are in the final year of their deals and marked improvement will be expected from both the Sharks and the Roosters if they are to keep their jobs. Flanagan has rolled the dice by signing Todd Carney. Smith, in his 25th year as a head coach in the NRL and still chasing his first premiership, has also rolled the dice, sacking Todd Carney and fellow recidivist Nate Myles.

Carney heads the list of big-name player moves over the course of the off-season. The big spenders were no doubt the Gold Coast, who invested in forwards Luke Douglas and Nate Myles along with centres Jamal Idris and Beau Champion. The Wests Tigers have looked to add a little more dynamism to their pack by forking out big for Adam Blair. England prop James Graham is the latest Englishman to join the NRL, signing with Canterbury, a club that once boasted British stars Jonathan Davies and Gary Connolly. Former Storm star Matt King is returning from Super League, set to partner Greg Inglis in the centres at South Sydney. The Knights have picked up Darius Boyd and Kade Snowden, significantly strengthening their line-up. The Warriors have made one of the most astute buys in recent memory, luring former Titans hooker Nathan Friend across the ditch. Parramatta have again gone risky in their recruitment, bringing in Chris Sandow and Willie Tonga. There are also a number of big names returning to the club where they built their reputation. After four seasons at Penrith, Petero Cironiceva is back at the Broncos. Danny Buderus and Timana Tahu both find themselves getting an encore at Newcastle. Ryan Hoffman will again wear the purple of the Storm after being forced out in 2011 due to salary cap constraints.

A close eye will also be kept on the long list of players coming off contract at the end of 2012, which tops 190 and includes 43 players who have played Origin or international football. Canberra are desperate to re-sign fullback Josh Dugan but Canterbury, the Wests Tigers and the Sydney Roosters have all been linked with the

Raiders custodian. Manly pair Kieran Foran and Brett Stewart have been touted to be on their way to Canterbury to re-join former coach Des Hasler and that will remain a simmering issue until they put pen to paper at either Brookvale or Belmore. Cooper Cronk comes off contract and South Sydney are prepared to offer him the world. Greg Bird could be on his way back to Cronulla to re-unite the Bash Brothers with Paul Gallen. There has been speculation Dave Taylor is not happy in Sydney and could be looking for a return to Queensland with the Cowboys his most likely suitor. Not to mention Sonny Bill Williams, whose five-year ban is up in 2013 and is looking to sign with the Sydney Roosters.

Those returning from injury will also be watched closely. Terry Campese managed only eight minutes in 2011 after a knee and then a groin injury kept the key Raiders playmaker sidelined. If he can turn Canberra around this year after a disastrous season, his stocks rise even further. Popular Souths hitman Sam Burgess wasn't seen after round seven due to an ankle injury and will be fired up to get back on the paddock. Exciting winger Michael Gordon returns from an ACL and will be hoping to have all his speed, elusiveness and strength back. Michael Ennis and Zeb Taia both suffered serious neck injuries in 2011 and will be looking to get their confidence back early in the year.

So we set off for life without Darren Lockyer, the first time since 1995 that we will endure a season without one of the all-time greats. But as great as Lockyer is, the game is bigger than one man and once again the NRL season will be centrepiece to the lives of most in New South Wales and Queensland, dominating the back pages and the water-cooler chatter.

With the Independent Commission finally (hopefully!) coming into being, a groundbreaking new television deal to be negotiated, New South Wales getting their best chance in many years to end Queensland's six-year Origin dominance and an all new representative bye weekend, rugby league is set for one of its biggest and most important years.

Another rugby league season is almost upon us and after a seemingly endless summer waiting for the greatest game of all to return, it can't come around quick enough. Let's hope it is as enthralling and as captivating and, fingers crossed, as profitable as ever.

Nick Tedeschi

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

There are many betting terms and phrases used in this publication. For anybody confused or unsure of the meaning of any expression, here is an in-depth list of all terms used.

ATS: Against the Spread (Against the Line/ Covered). ATS refers to how a team performed against the bookmaker's handicap (or line, as it is also known). When discussing team records for the 2011 season, 'against the spread' is essentially interchangeable with 'against the line' or 'against the number'. For example, if Canterbury were 2 ½ point favourites and won by 4 over Penrith, they would cover the spread. But if Canterbury either won by 2 points or less or lost the match, then Penrith would have covered the spread. References to the number of times a side 'covered' relate to the number of time the team in question successfully covered the spread. All lines referred to are opening lines provided by the TAB.

Attack Rankings: These rankings show where a club ranked among all sixteen teams in points scored, metres gained, offloads, tackle breaks and handling errors.

Attack-Defence Ranking Analysis: This analysis looks at the strengths and weaknesses of an individual team in regards their relative attack and defence statistics. It looks for trends such as Melbourne ranking top-two in points allowed each year over the last five and Brisbane ranking bottom-four in missed tackles every year since 2006. The analysis also gives a good indication of where a team sits heading into the 2012 season, what areas are likely to improve and what areas are likely to go backwards.

Average Price: This refers to a team's average head-to-head price throughout the season. Average Home Price is the team's average price in all home matches while the team's Average Away Price is the team's average price in all away matches.

Away Data: Teams designated with the away game have those statistics added to their away data. For example, the Roosters played a home game in Christchurch, New Zealand but that still counts as an away game for the Warriors even though the match was played in New Zealand. Underdogs received the away game allocation in semi-final matches played at neutral venues where both teams were from Sydney.

Blue Chip Players: These are players who rate in the top-third of their position. For fullbacks, five-eighths, halfbacks and hookers, this is top 5. For wingers, centres and props, this is top 10. For backrowers, this is top 15. The full list of this year's Blue Chip players can be found in Appendix C.

Club 5-Year Results: This table provides the records for each club over the last five seasons, breaking down the season into thirds and providing each club's record in each season over the opening third (matches 1-8), middle third (matches 9-16) and final third (matches 17-24). The table also displays each team's finals record and what round of the finals the team was eliminated from if that team made the finals.

Coach 5-Year Results: This table provides the records for each coach over the last five seasons, breaking down the season into thirds and providing each coach's record in each season over the opening third (matches 1-8), middle third (matches 9-16) and final third (matches 17-24). The table also displays each coach's finals record and what round of the finals the coach was eliminated from if that team made the finals.

Coach Rating: This is a measure of each and every coach based on their overall record, recent record, finals record, reputation, current relationship with players and tactical nous.

Defence Rankings: These rankings show where a club ranked among all sixteen teams in points allowed, metres conceded and missed tackles.

Draw Analysis: This portion of a team's analysis looks at the team's draw. It studies how each team traditionally performs over each third of the season, the difficulty of each team's start and finish and how each team will be impacted by State of Origin.

Favourite: The team/side/option in betting that is shortest in odds. In handicap betting, the favourite is often said to "have the minus" or "give the start" meaning they have to win by more than the handicap for handicap bettors to win the wager.

Final Assessment: This provides an overall summary of each team. It looks at where a club is currently at, what their upside is, what their downside is, what their strengths and weaknesses are, how strong their roster is and how good their coach is and where they fit in the greater NRL picture for the 2012 season.

5-Day Backup: This is when a club is forced to play five days after their last match. It is the shortest accepted time between games. Teams on a five day backup play on a Monday followed by a Saturday or on a Sunday followed by a Friday.

Games Lost to Injury/ Suspension/ Rep Duty: This metric is a measurement of how many games were lost by a team's starting thirteen in 2011 due to reasons other than a coach's decision. A low number suggests a team consistently fielded its strongest starting line-up while a high number suggests a team was forced to play without their strongest team significantly longer than other clubs.

Head-to-Head Betting: Also known as match odds, this is the price a bookmaker bets about a team for a particular match. The price is based on the bookmaker's perceived chance of victory given to each team.

Home Data: Teams designated with the home game have those statistics added to their home data. For example, South Sydney played a home game in Perth but that still counts as a home game for the Bunnies as does the Gold Coast playing a preliminary final at Lang Park against the Roosters. Favourites received the home game allocation in semi-final matches played at neutral venues where both teams were from Sydney.

Home, Away and Total Profit/ Loss: This number refers to the net profit a punter would have received back if placing \$1 on the club in each match. For example, the Broncos played 12 matches at home. If they won 5 games and paid \$2.00 in each of them, their home profit figure would be calculated as -\$2.00 (a \$12.00 outlay for a \$10.00 return) but if they won 7 games and paid \$2.00 in each of them, their home profit figure would be calculated as +\$2.00 (a \$12.00 outlay for a \$14.00 return). All prices are the TAB starting price for each match.

Home and Away Analysis/Record: This portion of a club's analysis looks at how each team has performed at home and on the road over the last five years.

Interstate: References to travelling interstate refers to when teams travel outside the state they play in. For the purposes of this publication, Canberra are considered to be in New South Wales while New Zealand is considered a separate state.

Net Recruitment Assessment: This is an assessment of a team's overall recruitment and retention and whether their roster has improved or gone backwards this offseason.

Off Bye: The match a team plays following their weekly bye. For the purposes of this publication, teams who play in the preliminary final who won a week off are considered to be playing off a bye.

Off Monday Night Football: The match a team plays following a match of Monday Night Football.

Position Ratings: For each club, every position is analysed with a mark out of ten given. Primarily this ranking considers a team's starting line-up, however, depth is also considered.

Prediction Range: This is the range where, given normal luck and a normal injury run, a team will most likely finish and is a measure of both a team's predicted finish and predicted volatility.

Representative Losses: This looks at which players are likely to play either State of Origin or in the Anzac Day Test.

Roster Rating: The overall roster rating is out of 80 and accounts for all Position Ratings plus the Coach Rating.

7-Day Plus Backup: This refers to when a team has seven days or longer to prepare for a match.

Strongest Team: This is the best possible side each team can play according to the author. For the most part, it is the team that will be played by the coach. There are exceptions, however, as at Canterbury with Bryson Goodwin likely to start ahead of Michael Lett on the wing despite the author rating Lett a stronger player than Goodwin.

Total Points Betting (Over/ Under): For every match, bookmakers will offer a bet type allowing punters to wager whether the total combined score for both teams will be above or below a certain number. When the total score finishes higher than the set total points line, the score is said to have gone "over." When the total score finishes lower than the set total points line, the score is said to have gone "under". Bookmakers usually bet \$1.91 for each side of the line. For example, bookmakers set a total points line of 44.5 for a match between Newcastle and Manly. If Newcastle beat Manly 34-20, the score has gone over. If, however, Newcastle beat Manly 22-20 then the score has gone under. Most total points lines total no smaller than 36.5 and no higher than 48.5 though there are exceptions. A team which is referred to as a "good under team" played in significantly more matches where the total score went "under" than where it went "over". The inverse is true for a "good over team".

Weighted Roster Rating: This take the Roster Rating (out of 80) and increased the value of the coach, halfback and hooker (from 10 to 15) and fullback and five-eighth (from 10 to 12.5) to create a rating out of 100.

2011 Betting Assessment: This portion of a club's analysis looks at how a club performed in a betting sense in 2010. It looks at many factors including situations where obvious betting situations existed, suggesting they may again arise in 2012.

2012 Betting Advice: This portion of a club's analysis looks at how a club is expected to perform in a betting sense in 2012, offering futures wagering advice as well as match situations that should prove strong this season.

Underdog: The team/side/option in betting that is longest in odds. In handicap betting, the underdog is often said to "have the plus" or "gets the points" meaning they can either win or lose by a margin within the allocated handicap for bettors who backed that team/side/option to win their bet.

2011 NRL BETTING ANALYSIS

The 2011 season again threw up some interesting trends for punters and the following should provide an insight into the betting patterns seen last year. Before reading on, readers should refer to appendices A and B at the back of the guide, which provides the detailed betting data used in the following chapter and throughout the book.

Home teams once again dominated, improving to 125-76 (62.13%) straight-up, up from 112-89 the previous season. Home teams also improved against the line to 112-89 (55.72%) from 108-93 (53.73%) in 2010. Home favourites, a big winner for punters, went 76-60 (55.88%), up from 72-68 (51.43%) in 2010. The record of home underdogs fell but the situation was still a winning play, going 36-29 (55.38%). That was down from 36-25 (59.02%) in 2010.

Overall, favourites went 105-96 (52.24%) after losing in 2010 with a 97-104 (48.26%) record.

Favourites of between 6.5 and 12 points were the strongest points covering situation in 2011, going 38-29 ATS (56.72%). Underdogs given in excess of two converted tries start went 7-6 ATS with big starts going 13-13 between favourites and underdogs the last two years.

Melbourne (24) started favourites on most occasions in 2011 followed by St George-Illawarra (23), Manly (22), Wests Tigers (17) and Brisbane (17). Cronulla (4) started favourites the fewest times last year followed by Parramatta (6), Penrith (7) and Gold Coast (8).

Over the last two years, St George-Illawarra (48) have started favourites more than any other team followed by Melbourne (43), Manly (38) and the Wests Tigers (34). Cronulla have been the least fancied team over that period, favoured only four times over the last two seasons followed by Newcastle (15), North Queensland (15) and South Sydney (18).

Defending premiers St George-Illawarra had the shortest average price of 2011 at \$1.46, followed by Melbourne (\$1.47), Manly (\$1.59) and Brisbane (\$1.73). Canterbury at \$1.85 had the shortest average price of teams that missed the finals while Newcastle at \$1.98 had the longest average price of teams to make the playoffs. Cronulla had the longest average price at \$2.46 followed by Parramatta (\$2.25) and Gold Coast (\$2.23). Cronulla, Parramatta and South Sydney were the only three average home outsiders.

Canterbury (8-3), North Queensland (7-3), South Sydney (6-3), Brisbane (11-6) and New Zealand (9-5) were the strongest bets as favourites in 2011 while the

Wests Tigers (6-3), Brisbane (6-4), Penrith (10-7) and Newcastle (9-7) were the most reliable underdog plays.

The Dragons were the top interstate team with a 4-1 ATS record when playing outside of NSW while Cronulla went 3-1 ATS when escaping their home state. Melbourne were 7-5 ATS outside Victoria and New Zealand were 9-7 ATS when playing in Australia, also top interstate plays, while the Tigers went 2-1 ATS when playing outside of NSW.

The Roosters (0-4) and Canterbury (0-3) didn't cover interstate while Canberra (1-4), Gold Coast (3-7) and North Queensland (4-7) were also poor travellers. Canberra (2-8) and North Queensland (4-15) have been the most unreliable interstate teams since 2010 while the Warriors (17-11) were the clear best travelling team to bet over the same period.

Manly were the dominant daytime team with a 7-2 ATS record in the sunshine while Melbourne (6-2), Newcastle (10-4), Cronulla (5-2), Canterbury (4-2) and Brisbane (2-1) were all good afternoon wagers. The Gold Coast (0-3), Canberra (1-9), Parramatta (1-3), Penrith (2-5), South Sydney (3-7) and the Sydney Roosters (3-7) were the worst daytime plays. Over the last two years Brisbane (7-2), Manly (12-6) and Melbourne (10-5) have been the best daytime teams while Canberra (4-15) and Parramatta (2-5) have been the worst.

Brisbane were the top night team in 2011 with a 15-9 ATS record ahead of Penrith (11-6) and North Queensland (13-9).

Interestingly, teams coming off a 5-day backup have gone 51-51 ATS over the last two years, putting to bed the theory that teams on a short turnaround don't win (or at least highlighting that bookmakers are making broadly the correct handicap allowance for teams coming off a quick backup). Teams coming off a bye went 18-14 ATS while those coming off Monday Night Football went 24-21 against the line.

The shortest priced favourite all year was the Wests Tigers in their round 25 clash with the Gold Coast at Campbelltown. The Tigers started at \$1.08 and were 20.5-point favourites in line betting with the home team going on to win 39-10. Interestingly, the second-shortest priced team of the year was the Melbourne Storm on the road at the Gold Coast. The Storm started \$1.12 and 17.5-point favourites at Skilled Stadium against the Titans but just snuck home 26-20. A total of 11 matches had lines of 14.5 or larger with favourites going 6-5 ATS. The two road favourites to start so short both failed to cover while four of the 11 outsiders won straight-out with a total of +\$9.00 if a \$1 head-to-head wager was placed on the outsider in each match. Over the last two years, betting the outsider straight-up when betting is 14.5 points or larger has a return on investment of 80.94%.

For the second straight year, Cronulla were the largest priced home winner, claiming victory at \$5.00 against St George-Illawarra in round two. Four other teams won at odds of larger than \$4.00: Canberra in Melbourne at \$5.25, South Sydney against St George-Illawarra at \$5.25, the Sydney Roosters against the Dragons at \$4.50 and New Zealand in Melbourne at \$4.00. Of the nine teams who started at odds of \$5.00 or larger, four didn't break 10 points while four scored exceeded 20.

Eight teams, if bet at level stakes in every match in head-to-head betting, would have provided bettors with a profit: Melbourne (\$6.07), North Queensland (\$4.89), Brisbane (\$4.59), Manly (\$3.92), South Sydney (\$1.58), New Zealand (\$1.26), Wests Tigers (\$0.56) and Newcastle (\$0.43). A total of 10 teams recorded a home profit while six made the black on the road.

In total points betting, it was again an under season with the under a massive 111-90 winner in 2011. That takes the two-year total for the under to an astonishing 217-185 (54.00%) as the bookmakers and punters trail the overall shift in the nature of the game to a more defence-oriented contest.

The top under teams in 2011 were New Zealand (18-10), Melbourne (17-9), St George-Illawarra (17-9), the Sydney Roosters (16-8), Newcastle (16-9) and Manly (15-12). Only the Roosters ranked among the top-six under teams and didn't make the finals while three of the four preliminary finalists were in same. Top teams are good defensive teams. Top teams are under teams. That can be taken to the bank in the current environment.

Only three teams had more than 50% of their games finish over: South Sydney (14-10), Cronulla (14-10) and North Queensland (14-11).

Bookmakers again did not react strongly enough to wet weather with the under in the rain going 29-13 (69.05%) under, compared to 82-77 (51.57%) under in the dry. Over the last two years, the under in the wet has gone 54-23. Wet weather leads to poor handling and smaller scores and bookies just refuse to go low enough with the lines or factor in the weather enough. The Cowboys (4-2 over) and Souths (3-2 over) were the only teams to finish better than 50% over in the wet.

Teams coming off a bye were 19-13 under taking the two-year total to 41-25 under off a bye. This sits well with the logic that tired teams leak points. When teams are freshened up, they are much sturdier defensively and matches tend to go under the total points mark. Additionally, coaches tend to work on defensive patterns and attitude more often in bye weeks when teams can be given a tougher time on the track.

One of the top under situations involved a home favourite where the under finished 76-60 while home underdog situations had the under coming up 35-30.

Day matches went 32-30 (51.61%) under while the under dominated at night, saluting with a 79-60 (56.83%) record. Over the last two years, the under is 159-125 (55.99%) once the sun has set.

Despite the under increasing noticeably in 2011, the most common ten-point breakdown actually rose from 31-40 to 41-50 with 31.84% of matches finishing in that range. That pipped 31-40 (26.87%). A total of 58.71% of matches ended up with totals between 31 and 50, up from 55.72% in 2010. The most noticeable changes were on the fringes 27.36% of games totalling below 30 (up from 19.90%) while games over 50 fell to 13.93% from 24.38%.

The number of totals finishing on 40 points or below rose from 49.25% in 2010 to 54.23% last year while those finishing above 40 fell from 50.75% to 45.77%. This effectively means that the over-under total points betting line should, on average, be set at at lower than 40.5 points (near 38.5), down at least two points from last year. Allowances should then be made for the trends highlighted above with respect to weather, stronger or weaker teams taking part, consideration of teams coming off a bye and the like. Keep these things in mind when big lines of 44.5 or larger are set.

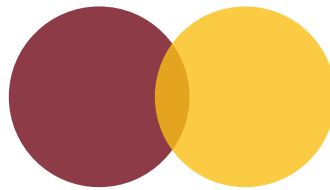
The largest total for the year was the 70 points put on in Newcastle's 50-20 round 21 home win against the Gold Coast. The two lowest totals were 14 points, coming in round 12 when Newcastle beat Parramatta 8-6 and in round 24 when Melbourne beat St George-Illawarra 8-6.

The largest total set for the year was 50.5 in the last round clash between Canterbury and Canberra, a match that was essentially meaningless. The game tallied 58, going over. Only two matches had lines greater than 46.5 (2-0 over) while only 13 games all year had a total of bigger than 44.5 (7-6 over).

The lowest total points line set was 33.5, thrown up for the round 12 game between Penrith and Souths and the round 20 game between Canterbury and Parramatta. Both finished under. A total of 17 games had total points lines 36.5 or less with the record being 13-4 under. Bookmakers do not go low enough for predicted low scoring games but the inverse does not hold true.

So 2011 was the year of the under, the year of the favourite and the year of the home team. Keep that in mind when wagering in 2012.

BRISBANE BRONCOS



Strongest Team

1. Josh Hoffman (fb)
2. Gerard Beale (w/c/fb)
3. Jack Reed (c)
4. Justin Hodges (c)
5. Jharal Yow Yeh (w)
6. Corey Norman (fe/fb)
7. Peter Wallace (hb)
13. Corey Parker (br)
12. Sam Thaiday (br/p)
11. Alex Glenn (c/w/br)
10. Ben Hannant (p)
9. Andrew McCullough (h/hb)
8. Petero Civoniceva (p)

-
14. Matt Gillett (br/c/w)
 15. Ben Te'o (br/c)
 16. Josh McGuire (p)
 17. Ben Hunt (h/hb)

Others: Luke Capewell (fb/fe), Kurt Baptiste (h), Scott Anderson (p), Mitchell Dodds (p), Dane Gagai (fb/w/c), Dale Copley (fb/w/c), Dane Carlaw (br/p), David Hala (p), Dunamis Lui (p), Mitch Rivett (w), Nick Slyney (br)

Gains: Petero Civoniceva (Penrith), Luke Capewell (Gold Coast), Nick Slyney (North Queensland)

Losses: Darren Lockyer (Retired), Shane Tronc (Retired), Denan Kemp (Rugby Union), Shea Moylan (Melbourne), Rohan Ahern (Released), Justin Hunt (South Sydney)

Net Recruitment Assessment: The day the Broncos have been fearing would arrive, has, with champion five-eighth Darren Lockyer retiring. Finding a replacement for a future Immortal and one of the most skilled and durable players to ever strap on a boot is obviously impossible but Brisbane have not chased a big name to take the No.6 jersey with only Luke Capewell being purchased to duke it out with Corey Norman and Ben Hunt for the vacancy. For the second straight year, the Broncos have had a champion former prop return with Petero Civoniceva re-joining the club after spending four seasons with Penrith. Civoniceva may be 35 years old and is no doubt on the verge of retirement but he remains one of the best dozen props in the game and forms a great prop rotation with Hannant, McGuire and perhaps Te'o or Hala. Shane Tronc was barely used last season so his loss won't

be felt. The Broncos have done what they can but faith has been put in the club's youngsters to replace Darren Lockyer. Only time will tell if it is the right move or not but given the club's history of finding young talent, you wouldn't bet against one of the youngsters turning into a viable playmaking option.

Representative Losses: (Likely) Justin Hodges, Sam Thaiday, Corey Parker, Petero Civoniceva, Ben Hannant, Jharal Yow Yeh, Alex Glenn, Jack Reed. (Possible) Josh Hoffman, Matt Gillett.

Position Ratings:

Fullback ----- 7.5

Josh Hoffman made giant strides in 2011 after winning the custodian job in 2010, becoming one of the most dangerous fullbacks in the game and a key part of Brisbane's attack. That attacking importance will grow this year with the retirement of Darren Lockyer. Hoffman finished third in metres gained, scoring six tries and setting up a further four, ranking No.23 in MTN's annual top 50. Has worked on his safety under the high ball and positions himself much better. If he continues to develop at this rate then 2012 shapes as a breakout year for the Brisbane No.1. Utility Gerard Beale and recruit Luke Capewell will serve as backups.

Three Quarters ----- 8.5

The Brisbane three-quarter line came of age in 2011 with three outside backs becoming internationals under the age of 24, joining revered centre Justin Hodges (who has played 11 Tests for Australia himself). So there is no questioning the class of the Broncos three-quarter line. Hodges turns 30 this year and is a perennially under an injury cloud but when fit there is no better centre in the game. His contribution has dropped in recent years but with a strong preseason he can wreak havoc down the right side. He will be partnered on the right by Jharal Yow Yeh, who, while prone to the odd howler, is a wonderfully instinctive try scorer. His defence remains worrisome but he is a classy finisher. On the left, Jack Reed and Gerard Beale both offer plenty. Reed debuted in round one last season and finished off playing for England in the Four Nations final, a top-notch year for the big-bodied, tough centre with nice footwork. Gerard Beale was used at fullback, on the wing and in the centres last year but will likely start 2012 on the left flank. Beale is fast and elusive and a player with plenty of upside. The decent Dale Copley offers cover on the wing and in the centres but is very poor defensively.

Five-Eighth ----- 3.5

The time has finally arrived with Darren Lockyer, a staple for the Broncos for a decade-and-a-half, now officially retired. There is no questioning Lockyer's importance to Brisbane – he was the club's leading playmaker, chief kicker and ever-reliable leader. Those are big boots to fill. Halfback Peter Wallace will be expected to assume some of Lockyer's old responsibilities but whoever wears the No.6 jersey – Corey Norman is the leading candidate with Luke Capewell and

Ben Hunt also in the mix – will be expected to lump a significant load. Norman has tremendous attacking potential but has not been able to hold a first grade spot and his defence is a query. Capewell has had his opportunities but at least has some first grade experience. Hunt hasn't really kicked on and seems more suited to the bench utility role. It would not be surprising to see Anthony Griffin chop and change throughout the season.

Halfback ----- 6.5

Peter Wallace is a long way from Brisbane's best player but is arguably their most important heading into 2012 with the key playmaking responsibilities falling on the former Origin half. After a disappointing 2010, Wallace improved last season, setting up 17 tries and kicking well but he is not a front-line playmaker as he offers no threat running the ball. He will need to find something if he is to take Brisbane back to a preliminary final.

Hooker ----- 7

In his fourth season of first grade at just 22 years of age, Andrew McCullough has gained plenty of experience at a very young age. And he has shown plenty during his time in first grade, in particularly a strong taste for tackling and a mean dummy that fools even the most cynical defender. He was much more disciplined last season, dropping his penalties as well as reducing his handling errors. A little one dimensional with the ball, he is in the Michael Ennis mould defensively and has the upside to become an elite hooker.

Prop ----- 9

After a four-year stint with Penrith, inspirational international Petero Civoniceva returns to the club where he built his reputation at in a 10-year career that netted three premierships. The man-mountain will turn 36 early in the season but remains one of the best prop forwards in the game, averaging over 120 metres and 20 tackles a game in 2011 while donning the green and gold in the Anzac Test. He is a great purchase. He will start with Ben Hannant, who himself returned to the Broncos last year after two seasons away. More of a defensive prop, Hannant gets through a mountain of work with his fearless running also a feature of his game. At 27, he is nearing his peak and should be ready for a career year. They will be joined by the ultra-promising Josh McGuire, who overcame a nasty eye injury to have a very productive season for Brisbane as one of their underrated stars last year. He will learn plenty from Petero and should turn into an elite prop in the Fuihui Moimoi style. The three big guns are all class and most importantly complement each other well. Depth is also solid with Scott Anderson reliable and David Hala, who has not fulfilled the early-career raps on him, able to produce in short spurts as the No.4 big man.

Backrow ----- 9

Brisbane have one of the strongest backrows in the NRL, packed to the gills with class and deep. Australian internationals Sam Thaiday and Corey Parker are poised to start with Kiwi international Alex Glenn. Future Queensland rep Matt Gillett

and the capable Ben Te'o will come off the bench and fill in more than capably with those two projected starters with most teams. Thaiday has been a staple in the Australian team for the last three seasons and has turned into a player with a voracious appetite for work, making 30 tackles and 110 metres a game. He combines that workload with high-impact play and is certainly in the top handful of second rowers in the game. Corey Parker does everything at a high level, making an astonishing 41 tackles and 135 metres a match. His rep call-up last season should spur him on in 2012. Alex Glenn is a quiet achiever who is on the rise, able to play tight or wide. Gillett had only a fair second season after a sensational debut year but there were injury excuses and he started in only eight matches. Te'o broke his arm twice and there are question marks over his commitment and common sense but when on song he is a strong runner.

Blue Chip Players: 7-Jharal Yow Yeh (wing), Justin Hodges (centre), Jack Reed (centre), Corey Parker (backrow), Sam Thaiday (backrow), Ben Hannant (prop), Petero Civoniceva (prop)

Coach Rating: ----- **7**
Anthony Griffin (2rd season at Brisbane, 2rd in the NRL)

Coach History:
W-L Record: 20-7
Finals Record: 2-1
Finals Seasons: 1
Premierships: 0
Club Record: 20-7

Coach Analysis: The Broncos front office certainly pulled the right rein leading up to season 2011 by dumping Ivan Henjak and replacing him with the highly respected and well-credentialed Anthony Griffin. A real players coach, Griffin immediately had the support of the senior playing group who had abandoned Henjak because of his autocratic and intense style. The result was an immediate improvement with the Broncos opening the season 7-1 and going all the way to a preliminary final. The most notable progress came in Brisbane's defence, which received a much greater emphasis than it did under Henjak. Griffin also brought in a good deal of enthusiasm to a stale looking side by injecting young players such as Jack Reed into the action early. Calm, focussed, liked, respected and knowledgeable, Griffin is a long-term coach. If Brisbane suffer through a bad season, it is unlikely to be because of poor coaching.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	18-6	3rd	7-1	4-4	7-1	2-1		Preliminary Final
2010	11-13	10th	2-6	6-2	3-5	DNQ	--	
2009	14-10	6th	6-2	3-5	5-3	2-1		Preliminary Final
2008	14-9-1	5th	6-2	2-5-1	6-2	1-1		Semi Final
2007	11-13	8th	3-5	5-3	3-5	0-1		Qualifying Final

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	18-6	3rd	7-1	4-4	7-1	2-1		Preliminary Final

Draw Analysis: The start of the season has been key to the Broncos' fortunes in recent years. In 2008, 2009 and 2011 they started 6-2 or better and made it to at least the second week of the finals. In 2007 and 2010 they started below .500 and failed to make an impact in September either year. They have a reasonable start to the season with four home and four away against four 2011 finals sides and four who missed out. Their first five matches will all be played on Friday night. A home clash against the Cowboys in round two followed by a road game against former coach Wayne Bennett in round three are the big early matches for Brisbane. The Broncos are usually hit pretty hard during the Origin period and this year have a run of v Manly, at Melbourne, v Newcastle with a bye after the Manly match in the middle weeks this year. Their first bye comes before Origin I while their second bye comes after Origin III. Anthony Griffin rested senior players after rep games last year and may do the same after Origin I and II this year when they play at Melbourne and at North Queensland. The Broncos have three straight home games interspersed with a bye between round 16 and 19 against Souths, Cronulla and New Zealand, a run that will have a major influence on where the Broncos finish. The Broncos don't play a finals team from 2011 between rounds 20 and 23 (including the two clear-cut bottom rated teams) but then host Melbourne and go to Manly before finishing off with Penrith at Suncorp. Brisbane have few tendencies but they usually need to start the season well to figure prominently. They get their chance to start well and find some form heading into the finals and with a great run from rounds 16 to 23, a good start could see them finish top four.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	20-7	12-2	8-5
2010	11-13	5-7	6-6
2009	16-11	9-4	7-7
2008	15-10-1	9-4	6-6-1
2007	11-14	6-6	5-8
Five-Year Total	73-55-1	43-23	32-32-1

Home and Away Analysis: Brisbane have had a strong home field advantage over the last five seasons, winning 64.1% of their home matches including a 12-2 record at Suncorp in 2011. One of the prime reasons for their fall from grace in 2010 was their disappointing home record, winning only 5 of 12 at the old Lang Park. Home efforts were addressed early by Anthony Griffin in 2011 and the result was only two losses – a round one defeat to the Cowboys and a hammering sans the club's Origin stars in round 12. On the road, Brisbane are a dead-on .500 team over the last five seasons, having not had a year without at least five road wins.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	6th	9th	8th	3rd	10th
Metres	12th	5th	14th	12th	6th
Offloads	15th	5th	16th	14th	13th
Tackle Breaks	5th	1st	3rd	4th	5th
Errors	9th	4th	2nd	10th	2nd

Defence Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	4th	11th	14th	5th	7th
Metres Conceded	11th	15th	13th	9th	16th
Missed Tackles	4th	15th	16th	15th	16th

Attack-Defence Ranking Analysis: The major improvement seen in the Brisbane Broncos under Anthony Griffin was a significant change in defensive attitude and execution. After four straight seasons in the bottom-two for missed tackles, the Broncos ranked fourth in 2011, a huge improvement. The points leaked in the two seasons under Ivan Henjak also dried up under Griffin, improving from 14th and 11th to fourth. Their attacking numbers tell a much happier story with Brisbane one of the leading tackle break teams thanks to the likes of exciting fullback Josh Hoffman,

strong centre Justin Hodges and strong lock Corey Parker, ranking top-five since 2006. Brisbane teams also traditionally have very good hands, ranking top-four in handling errors in four of the last six years but fell away last year, ranking ninth. Under Griffin, the Broncos played a much more conservative attacking game, finishing 15th in offloads (a low offload count is usually an indicator of a disciplined team). The major weakness was fixed up under Griffin and on only a few weeks notice. With a full pre-season, defence is not expected to be an issue. It is attack that will be Griffin's focus though as he attempts to prepare for life post-Darren Lockyer. Finding a style to cover the loss of Lockyer will be key to Brisbane's performance in 2012.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	Jharal Yow Yeh	14
2010	Israel Folau	20
2009	Israel Folau	17
2008	Denan Kemp	19
2007	Justin Hodges	12

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 55 (6th) 2011 Key Position: 17 (9th)
 2010: 61 (9th)

Games Lost Analysis: The Broncos were hit slightly harder than average in 2010 and last year had a slightly better than average run with games lost to injury/suspension/rep duty. Brisbane lost a few games in the key positions with Josh Hoffman suffering a broken leg early in the season before having his year ended in round 26 when he suffered a ruptured posterior cruciate ligament. Darren Lockyer was rested for four games throughout the year but missed the preliminary final loss with a fractured jaw. Centre Justin Hodges again missed time, losing 10 matches to Origin and a hamstring injury while rep forwards Ben Hannant and Sam Thaiday were absent for a combined 13 games due to resting, a hip injury to Hannant and a suspension to Thaiday. Bench forward Ben Te'o managed only 14 games all season while other bench utility Matt Gillett missed eight matches. Reserve prop Josh McGuire missed 10 games with a career threatening eye injury. The Broncos lost some quality players in 2011, particularly Hoffman and Lockyer in September, but also took a real hit to their depth with bench players missing significant time.

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$11.00
 Minor Premiership: \$9.00
 Top 4: \$2.50
 Top 8: \$1.55

The Bookmaker: "I can't have the Broncos after losing club legend Darren Lockyer to retirement."

-Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

2011 Betting Analysis: Brisbane were the best team to bet in 2011, going 17-10 ATS as they were undervalued by the market all season. After going 14-10 ATS in 2010, Brisbane are now 31-20 against the line over the last two years. The Broncos were equally adept at home as they were on the road, going 9-5 ATS at Suncorp and 8-5 ATS away from home. Anthony Griffin's men were 11-6 ATS as a favourite and an exceptional 4-2 ATS when favoured on the road, equal best in the league with Canterbury. They also covered a start of 13 or bigger twice, the only team in the NRL to do same. Brisbane were, surprisingly, outsiders on 10 occasions, covering six times. The Broncos covered two of three in their rare daytime appearances while they were 6-3 ATS in rain-affected games. Playing Brisbane in head-to-head markets at home and away were both profitable. The Broncos were an under team last year, going 15-12 under over the course of the year. Much of the final number was due to wet weather with the Broncos going 8-1 under in nine games affected by rain. In the dry, Brisbane were 11-7 over. They were a particularly strong under bet as a home favourite, going under in 8 of 11 games in said situation. Such was the improvement in Brisbane's defence that their games totalling over 51 points fell from nine in 2010 to two last year.

Mr Rugby Assessment: Amazing kids, a handful of classy veterans and wonderful depth. However the loss of Lockyer and no proven replacement leaves me slightly worried. Not to mention the possibility of the dreaded second-year syndrome hitting a few of the abovementioned youngsters. Price: \$10.00

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 58 (6th)

Weighted Roster Rating: 71 (6th)

Predicted Finishing Range: 3rd-10th

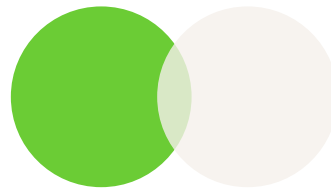
Predicted Finish: 6th

Obituaries proclaiming the death of the Brisbane Broncos last year were premature and those who offered them, this author included, severely underestimated the front office of the club. They sensed trouble with Ivan Henjak as the season drew closer and knowing it would likely be their last shot with Darren Lockyer on the paddock, dumped the oddball and polarising coach on the eve of the season. The move worked a treat with the Broncos uniting around new coach Anthony Griffin and the cause of sending Lockyer out a winner. The focus was defence and that area of Brisbane's game improved markedly, as did their form at home. This year the key areas will be attack and leadership and how the void of Darren Lockyer will be filled. I doubt leadership will be a concern. Sam Thaiday, Petero Civoniceva and Corey Parker are quality replacements. Playmaking, however, is going to be a major worry. Halfback Peter Wallace does not have the skillset to take on the chief

playmaking role, meaning a young player like Corey Norman will be thrown into first grade with the expectation of getting Brisbane's quality outside backs firing. This will take time, if it happens at all. Without a quality playmaker, Brisbane are going to find it very difficult to go all the way. They should be back in the finals again – they almost have to be with their pack, three-quarter line and outstanding young fullback – but the absence of a quality half just seems too much to overcome. A finals team but one with a major flaw.

2012 Betting Advice: Brisbane have proven to be one of the top wagering sides over the last two years, going 31-20 against the bookies' line and with Darren Lockyer retiring, they may again be undervalued by the market. They are worth sticking with in handicap and head-to-head betting. Brisbane are also a very good road team so don't be afraid to take them on away from home. They also shape as a strong under proposition this year. They significantly improved their defence in Anthony Griffin's first season and with the loss of their key playmaker, it seems as if points will be hard to come by. The combination makes for a strong under assumption. Taking the under in Brisbane's wet games is always a good bet, having gone 11-2 under over the last two years. There is not a lot of value in futures markets for the Broncos. The \$1.55 on Brisbane to make the eight is worth considering but is a little tight to actually unload on.

CANBERRA RAIDERS



Strongest Team

1. Josh Dugan (fb)
2. Reece Robinson (w)
3. Jarrod Croker (c)
4. Joel Thompson (c/br)
5. Blake Ferguson (w/c)
6. Terry Campese (fe)
7. Josh McCrone (hb/fe)
13. Shaun Fensom (br)
12. Josh Papalii (br),
11. Tom Learoyd-Lahrs (br/p)
10. Dane Tilse (p)
9. Glen Buttriss (h)
8. David Shillington (p)

-
14. Shaun Berrigan (h/c/fe/hb)
 15. Joe Picker (br)
 16. Bronson Harrison (br)
 17. Brett White (p)

Others: Sam Williams (hb), Travis Waddell (h), Michael Picker (fe/hb), Drury Low (w), Trevor Thurling (br/p), Mark Nicholls (br), Nathan Massey (fb), Sam Mataroa (br/p), Mark Appleton (p), Mark Ioane (p), James Stuart (c/w), Michael Chee Kam (br), Matt McIlwrick (br)

Gains: Shaun Berrigan (New Zealand)

Losses: Alan Tongue (Retired), Matt Orford (Released), Josh Miller (St George-Illawarra), Daniel Vidot (St George-Illawarra), Danny Galea (Penrith), David Milne (Released)

Net Recruitment Assessment: The Raiders were naturally a little wary after last year's recruitment disaster that saw them bring in the oft-injured and always underperforming Matt Orford, who was without doubt the bust of 2011. Matters weren't helped when Blake Ferguson took a significant step backwards in his development. So despite finishing 15th, David Furner's team have added only aging utility Shaun Berrigan despite needing an upgrade at hooker, more hardness in the centres, a reliable winger and a hard-tackling second rower. The failure of the Raiders to fill at least some of these needs is a further indictment on a club that is both reactionary and staid. Allowing reliable forward Josh Miller to walk away is a further mark against the Raiders. Leadership may also be an issue in 2012 with skipper Alan Tongue retiring, leaving a definite void of dependable senior players who lead by example every week.

Representative Losses: (Likely) David Shillington, Josh Dugan. (Possible) Tom Learoyd-Lahrs, Terry Campese.

Position Ratings:

Fullback ----- 9.5

Josh Dugan made his Origin debut last season but overall 2011 was a disappointment for the hottest young fullback in the game, injury hampering his season. Dugan managed only 13 club games and missed out on Origin II and III with persistent leg and groin complaints. His absence/ineffectiveness certainly played a part in the Raiders' horrible year. If he can stay fit and healthy, he will return to being the most dangerous kick returner in the game and if he starts chiming into the backline as a second five-eighth, then he will be one of the top attacking weapons in the game. His courage is also worth noting. In a contract year, forecasts are for his best season ever. Nathan Massey will fill in if injury or Origin calls Dugan.

Three Quarters ----- 5

Arguably the most disappointing element of Canberra's shocking 2011 was the sub-par play of the entire three-quarter line. Defensively, they were abhorrent, missing 26.5% of all tackles, an incredible number. Ball handling was just as shocking with Blake Ferguson and Jarrod Croker ranking top-seven in dropped balls while Daniel Vidot was averaging over 1.5 errors per game. Vidot is gone, but the Raiders have not spent on his replacement, merely upgrading the only fair Reece Robinson. Blake Ferguson was an incredible disappointment in his first year with his carefree style of play costing the Raiders dearly so often. The 2011 Willie M Medal winner may have great athleticism and upside but he is a player who cannot be relied on. The centre pairing is also worrisome. Joel Thompson's form was only fair after a wonderful 2010 but Jarrod Croker's play dropped way off. His small stature and lack of speed is a major concern, as is his commitment in defence. He would struggle to start at most clubs.

Five-Eighth ----- 7.5

Having played only eight minutes in 2011, Terry Campese comes into 2012 both fresh and short of a gallop. After battling back from a torn ACL, he lasted eight minutes before going down with a groin injury. There should be few ramifications from the groin but knee injuries take a long time to recover from with the primary issue usually confidence. Campese's strength lies in his ability to test the line but it would be surprising to see him jump from the blocks. He is an upgrade on Josh McCrone and at his best he is a rep-level No.6 but there are question marks over his health, both physical and mental, no doubt.

Halfback ----- 7.5

The less said about Matt Orford the better. Arguably the most maligned recruit in the history of Australian rugby league, Orford turned in six horrid performances before he sat out the rest of the year "injured". The Raiders released Orford with the

halfback spot coming down to a battle between Josh McCrone and Sam Williams. It will be a close run thing. Williams has more upside but seemed overwhelmed last year when thrown into first grade. McCrone, under trying circumstances, got a pass mark last year when being forced to direct the team from five-eighth. He is certainly better off as a second banana and with a decent kick and competent running game, he can do a job next to Terry Campese.

Hooker ----- 5

The hooker role remains a problem for Canberra with the average Glen Buttriss, 33-year-old recruit Shaun Berrigan and the inconsistent Travis Waddell fighting for the starting job and possibly a bench role. That isn't a star-studded list of contenders. Buttriss will likely get first crack. He is honest, a hard worker, but nothing more. Berrigan is a genuine utility who came from the Warriors, where he played in the centres. He has won a Clive Churchill Medal as a hooker though and will likely return to that role at the Raiders. Waddell has poor hands and will only see first grade if there is a run of injuries.

Prop ----- 8

The Raiders front row rotation was one of the big disappointments of 2011 with David Shillington battling injury and form issues, Tom Learoyd-Lahrs playing very little and Brett White not performing as the representative prop he was only a season back. In fact, Canberra's best prop in 2011 was their only non-international, Dane Tilse. Tilse is a lumbering type but he is a real slugger who can bend the line. Shillington was extremely lucky to win an Australian jersey at season's end after an ordinary year of production following a breakout 2010. He was battling injury and deserves another chance but as one of the pack's leaders it is imperative that he steps up this season. White is what he is: an aggressive, overrated prop with a decent hit-up and a penchant for stupidity. Learoyd-Lahrs could be used as either a prop or a backrower. He fits in better as a backrower but played exclusively as a prop when on the paddock last year. His running was really off and there are real question marks over how much upside he really has. I doubt he will ever become the player many expect he will be.

Backrow ----- 6.5

There are high hopes for Shaun Fensom, the Canberra lock and tackling machine who added an attacking component to his outstanding defensive game in 2011. He was one of Canberra's few bright spots last year. Tom Learoyd-Lahrs could find himself returning to the backrow this year. He is better suited on the fringes. Josh Papalii was Canberra's best find in 2011. He emerged as a hard running type who was very difficult to tackle, similar to a young Josh Miller. Bronson Harrison was possibly the biggest disappointment in the competition last year, regressing from a skilful, hard-working type to a lazy and useless player lucky to remain in first grade. Joe Picker and Trevor Thurling are sound enough bench options and provide adequate depth but are inconsistent with both suffering from poor hands.

Blue Chip Players: 2- Josh Dugan (fullback), Shaun Fensom (backrow)

Coach Rating: David Furner (4th season at Canberra, 4th in the NRL) ----- **2**

Coach History:

W-L Record: 29-45

Finals Record: 1-1

Finals Seasons: 1

Premierships: 0

Club Record: 29-45

Coach Analysis: It is astonishing that Furner remains in a job considering his shocking record and his culpability in an abhorrent 2011. At any other club, Furner would have been fired long ago but at the Raiders, where staidness, conservatism and an unabashed giddiness for the Furner family exists, he is so safe that board members will publicly declare that “he’d have to lose another 30 games” to have his position brought into question. Having his brother as CEO doesn’t hurt. A tepid coaching review was implemented at season’s end but it had little bite. Such was its importance, the chief executive went on long-service leave to round out 2011 while the coach didn’t return to Australia until late November after travelling as Tim Sheens’ assistant for the Four Nations. Make no mistake: Furner is not only one of the worst coaches in first grade, he is one of the game’s worst in the last 20 years. He lacks creativity, courage and conviction. He has completely destroyed Canberra’s once-flamboyant attack and the defence has oscillated between limp and insipid. Despite a strong forward pack and a deep well of backline talent, the Raiders cannot win a game. Bar a three-month period at the backend of 2010 and the Raiders have been close to the worst team in the NRL during Furner’s reign. Furner cannot get the team fit for the start of the season. His players are constantly injured. His game plans are virtually non-existent. He won’t drop out-of-form players. He cannot get the most out of his team. New assistant Justin Morgan looks the natural successor but the Raiders have never fired a coach mid-season so it would seem likely that Furner will not only see out the season but probably the end of his deal, which remarkably runs until 2014. Furner is one of the few coaches in the game that actually holds back his team. Having nobody in charge would be a better option.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	6-11	15th	1-7	4-4	1-7	DNQ	--	
2010	13-11	7th	3-5	3-5	7-1	1-1	Semi Final	
2009	9-15	13th	2-6	4-4	3-5	DNQ	--	
2008	13-11	6th	3-5	4-4	6-2	0-1	Qualifying Final	
2007	9-15	14th	3-5	3-5	3-5	DNQ	--	

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	6-18	15th	1-7	4-4	1-7	DNQ	--	
2010	13-11	7th	3-5	3-5	7-1	1-1	Semi Final	
2009	9-15	13th	2-6	4-4	3-5	DNQ	--	

Draw Analysis: Canberra have been dreadful starters and suffered their worst season opener last year when going 1-7 in their first eight. Under David Furner – who seemingly does not believe in getting his teams fit and prepared in time for the start of the season – the Raiders have not finished better than 3-5 after eight matches, going 6-18 to open the season combined in his three-year tenure. With matches against five top-eight teams from last year as well as two trips to Queensland in the first eight, it is hard to see the Raiders starting well, particularly considering their first three home matches are against Melbourne, North Queensland and New Zealand. They may not start favourite until they take on the Sharks at home in round eight with the Cowboys match and the away clash against the Roosters in round three the only real winnable matches for Canberra if they play at or near last year's level. After a poor start, the Raiders tend to level out going either 3-5 or 4-4 over the last five years. They have just three home games in their eight middle-season matches but only one interstate journey. They get their regular bunnies St George-Illawarra in this period. Canberra's byes come in rounds 11 and 15 meaning they will be playing Newcastle and the Dragons without any Origin players before Origin II and III, a scenario that will likely favour the Raiders. Canberra's fate is usually determined by how they finish the season and they will get every opportunity for a big finale this year with five home matches and trips to Cronulla and Penrith. Canberra are poor starters and with a terrible coach and a fairly ordinary team it would seem they are in for another long year with only an easy late-season fixture able to rescue them.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	6-18	4-8	2-10
2010	14-12	7-6	7-6
2009	9-15	7-5	2-10
2008	13-12	9-3	4-9
2007	9-15	7-5	2-10
Five-Year Total	58-66	37-24	21-42

Home and Away Analysis: Canberra's inability to win on the road has caused the club no end of grief over the last five seasons, winning only 27.4% of road games including three seasons where they went 2-10 away from Canberra Stadium. The

Raiders' inability to win on the road has had a direct correlation to their lack of finals football. 2011 was their first losing season at home since 2001 last year, going a horrendous 4-8. For all the talk of Canberra's home ground advantage, the Raiders have won only 55.7% of matches at home over the last five years, with only one season seeing them finish better than 7-5 at Bruce.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	13th	10th	12th	2nd	9th
Metres	5th	1st	5th	8th	15th
Offloads	12th	3rd	3rd	1st	7th
Tackle Breaks	11th	6th	11th	13th	15th
Errors	13th	7th	4th	13th	16th

Defence Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	15th	7th	10th	8th	15th
Metres Conceded	8th	7th	5th	12th	7th
Missed Tackles	15th	10th	3rd	5th	14th

Attack-Defence Ranking Analysis: Canberra's attacking metrics fell through the floor last year, ranking 11th or worse in all categories bar metres gained. This is a continuation of the gelding of Canberra's attacking style under David Furner, where the team went from second in points scored in 2008 to 13th last season with the best under Furner being a ranking of 10th. The Raiders did little well with the ball last year with only their metres made – an indication of good prop and fullback play – their only attacking metric in the top 11. Defensively the Raiders were extremely poor, ranking 15th in points conceded and missed tackles with Sam Williams, Jarrod Croker, Matt Orford, Bronson Harrison, Danny Galea, David Shillington and Bronson Harrison all missing over 2.75 tackles a game. Missed tackles have fallen from fifth to 15th under Furner. If the Raiders are to turn around last year's disaster, working on defensive attitude would be a good starting point.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	Blake Ferguson	13
2010	Daniel Vidot	16
2009	Jarrod Croker	12
2008	Adrian Purtell	15
2007	Todd Carney	12

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 87 (14th) 2011 Key Position: 57 (16th)
2010: 61 (9th)

Games Lost Analysis: The Raiders were terrible in 2011 and there is no doubt a long injury list contributed. Canberra were hit worse than any other team in the key positions with over three times the average games lost and 32 more than the third-worst hit team. Five-eighth Terry Campese managed only eight minutes, recovering from a knee reconstruction before hurting his groin. Star fullback Josh Dugan missed 11 matches with an array of leg injuries and Origin duty. Matt Orford joined the club injured and was gone after only six matches (though there are some question marks over the legitimacy over his injury by the end of the season and whether he was actually the first-choice halfback). Skipper and hooker Alan Tongue missed five matches early in the year with a shoulder injury. Internationals David Shillington (eight matches) and Tom Learoyd-Lahrs (10) also missed significant time. Such a brutal injury wallop is very difficult to overcome but much of it must be laid on Canberra's fitness staff, who perennially have their players underprepared.

2011 Betting Analysis: Canberra were an historically poor betting proposition in 2011. The Raiders covered only six times in 24 games and are now 17-33 against the line over the last two years. The Raiders were 3-7 when spotting a start and 3-11 when getting the points. As a home favourite, Canberra made the number only 25% of the time while they were a shocking 1-9 as a road underdog. When going interstate, Canberra were 1-3 ATS. Canberra received a try or less start seven times and did not make the number in a single one of them. When favoured at home by less than a converted try, they had a mark of 2-6 against the bookies' line. Day matches were particularly abhorrent for the Raiders with Canberra 1-9 ATS playing on Sunday afternoons. Long breaks did not suit the Raiders with Canberra failing to cover in eight games played off a 7-day or longer backup. One positive for the Raiders was their form in wet weather, covering two of three. Betting Canberra head-to-head every game resulted in a loss both home and away and the fourth-worst season result. The Raiders went 12-12 over-under in 2011 with few strong tendencies. They were 4-0 under when travelling interstate as an underdog and 9-5 under at night, conversely going 7-3 over in the day. The Raiders are now 20-11 under at night and 13-6 over in the day over the last two years. Canberra games totals under 30 halved last year from six in 2010 to three in 2011.

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$26.00
Minor Premiership: \$34.00
Top 4: \$7.00
Top 8: \$2.75

The Bookmaker:

“Julia Gillard has more chance of re-election than the Raiders have of winning a premiership under David Furner.”

-Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

Mr Rugby Assessment: If Terry Campese returns to his best form and Josh Dugan gives club footy the appropriate respect, the Raiders could do some damage this year. However they are two big “ifs”. Price: \$24.00

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 49 (14th)

Weighted Roster Rating: 59.5 (14th)

Predicted Finishing Range: 8th-16th

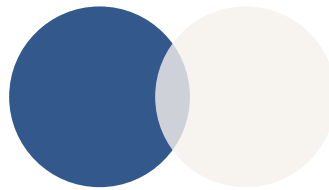
Predicted Finish: 14th

When declaring Canberra's premiership window had opened last year, I had clearly given too much weight to the positives and not nearly enough to the negatives. Despite calling coach David Furner “average at best” I had overrated the coach's ability. We all know how the recruitment of Matt Orford went. Many of Canberra's players peaked in late 2010 and then regressed to the norm in 2011. Players like Jarrod Croker, Joel Thompson and Bronson Harrison were all subsequently overvalued. Not enough weight was given to Canberra's inability to start well or to the heavy reliance on two players – Terry Campese and Josh Dugan. So despite a list that has changed very little, the ratings have been re-adjusted and it seems the Raiders are in for a long year. There are positives for Canberra. Dugan and Campese will enter the season fit and healthy with the former in a contract year. Shaun Fensom continues to develop as one of the elite defensive backrowers in the NRL. But the negatives are overwhelming. The coaching situation is dire with the toothless investigation into its poor performance at the end of last season providing nothing but mid-level scapegoats. Canberra's attack has disintegrated under Furner and the defence got just as bad last year. The three-quarters have major defensive issues. There is little class at halfback and hooker, a major problem considering those two positions touch the ball more than any others. There is a lack of depth in the backrow. Handling has been atrocious. Based on recent history, Canberra will start the season not fit or ready and with a tough draw will again find themselves in a hole. A history of poor preparations suggest injuries will again be an issue. Until David Furner is removed and a coach with vision, bottle, intelligence and the support of his players is hired, Canberra won't be contending for anything but the wooden spoon. For the first time since 1986, Canberra will miss the finals in consecutive seasons.

2012 Betting Advice: The best bet that can be recommended for the Raiders in 2012 is the \$9.00 available on the club to record the most losses. It isn't outstanding value but it is a touch of overs with Canberra a clear bottom-four rater. Those considering the Raiders should wait until midway through the Origin period

because a tough opening start will see their price blow in premiership betting. Considering the cover form of the Raiders over the last two years, they are probably best avoided for the most part in 2012, particularly on the road and in the afternoon. Canberra are 4-15 ATS in day games over the last two years and are 4-14 ATS when favoured by under a converted try. Essentially, the Raiders' home form is overvalued and that trickles down to their away form. Steer clear of Canberra. When they are hot, they are hot but more often than not they personify tepid mediocrity. Total points trends over the last two years suggest the over is a good bet in Raiders day games (an over/opposition multi seems a strong play in Canberra afternoon matches, particularly if Canberra are the favourites) and the under in night matches.

CANTERBURY BULLDOGS



Strongest Team

1. Ben Barba (fb/fe/hb/c)
2. Steve Turner (w/fb)
3. Tim Lafai (c/w)
4. Josh Morris (c)
5. Michael Lett (w)
6. Joel Romelo (h/fe)
7. Trent Hodgkinson (hb)
13. David Stagg (br)
12. Jake Foster (br)
11. Frank Pritchard (br)
10. Aiden Tolman (p)
9. Michael Ennis (h)
8. James Graham (p)

-
14. Greg Eastwood (p/br)
 15. Sam Kasiano (p)
 16. Corey Payne (br)
 17. Kris Keating (fe/hb/h)

Others: Bryson Goodwin (w), Jonathan Wright (c), Martin Taupau (p), Dene Halatau (br/h/c), Daniel Rauicava (c), Tim Browne (p), Josh Jackson (br), Trent Cutler (fe/fb/w/c), Josh Reynolds (h/hb/fe), James Gavett (p), Luke MacDougall (c/w), Harlan Alaalatoa (br), Dale Finucane (br)

Gains: James Graham (St Helens), Luke MacDougall (Saracens), James Gavett (New Zealand)

Losses: Andrew Ryan (Retired), Jamal Idris (Gold Coast), Ben Roberts (Parramatta), Michael Hodgson (Retired), Chris Armit (Penrith), Brad Moran (Retired), Aiden Sezer (Gold Coast), Mickey Paea (Released), Gary Warburton (Released), Junior Tia-Kilifi (Penrith), Nathan Smith (Parramatta)

Net Recruitment Assessment: The 2011-12 offseason has been one of great flux for Canterbury and as such there has been little done on the recruitment front. It seems increasingly likely that Todd Greenberg is keeping a war fund for new recruitment boss Noel Cleal to put to use for 2013. The one big purchase is hulking English prop James Graham, a Man of Steel winner and a player capable of rating among the elite props in the game. If he goes as well as fellow import Gareth Ellis or even Sam Burgess, then he is going to be a very good purchase. There has been a significant overturning of players over the offseason with club captain Andrew Ryan and boom centre Jamal Idris the two most notable losses. Ryan wanted another

season and seemed harshly treated. Idris has a big future if he keeps his mind on the job and his leaving was a huge blow. A good deal of depth was also lost with a host of fringe first graders who played 39 top grade games in 2011 including Ben Roberts, Michael Hodgson, Chris Armit, Mickey Paea and Gary Warburton all leaving. In terms of contribution, however, little has been lost with those five moving on. There is little doubt the Bulldogs regressed in net terms based on their on-field recruitment but it is off the paddock that the Bulldogs have made their splash.

Representative Losses: (Likely) Josh Morris, James Graham, Michael Ennis. (Possible) Aiden Tolman, Greg Eastwood.

Position Ratings:

Fullback ----- 6

Ben Barba is perhaps the hardest player to assess in the NRL and certainly among all fullbacks. There is no questioning his attacking ability: he led the NRL in tries with 23 and line breaks with 30, with second placed-Matt Cooper an astonishing 11 behind. But he committed the fourth-most handling errors with his confidence taking a battering under the high ball at times. His tackling also leaves plenty to be desired. He deserves his shot at the No.1 jersey in 2012 – he did come in No.37 in MTN's top 50 list – and is certainly a first grader but his natural position remains uncertain. Expect more of the same in 2012: scintillating attack, questionable defence and a shaky time under the high ball. If he has improved under the high ball then his position at the back will become much more assured. Steve Turner, a little too slow at this stage of his career for fullback, will serve as the second-liner.

Three Quarters ----- 5

The loss of Jamal Idris really hurts Canterbury. Despite his shameful effort last season after defecting to the Gold Coast, he was the one Canterbury outside back who could be considered a match-winner. This year Canterbury have two slow wingers, an international centre who is defensively challenged and an eight-gamer who looks a decent prospect but is unpolished and unlikely ever to be an elite type. Wing is a major concern. Any combination of Steve Turner, Michael Lett, Bryson Goodwin and Jonathan Wright are the worst wing combination in the league. All bar Turner are prone to errors and none have even decent pace. The centre situation is marginally better. Josh Morris is the one outside back with genuine class, getting called up for Australia's Four Nations campaign, but he did get dropped to then NSW Cup last season. He can score tries but seemed to lose a step of speed last year (injury perhaps?) but his tackling is poor and defensive reads worse. He is under the gun in 2012. Tim Lafai showed nice footwork and decent speed in his debut season, proving elusive in averaging nearly five tackle breaks per game, but he does not look to have elite skills. The injury-plagued Luke MacDougall, who is 30 years old and has played 16 games over the last five seasons, will act as cover. The Bulldogs faithful will hope he isn't required.

Five-Eighth ----- 3

If Canterbury are chasing Kieran Foran, they had best get his signature soon because the five-eighth situation at Belmore is dire. New coach Des Hasler will have a choice between Kris Keating and Joel Romelo unless he opts for an up-and-comer, usual-hooker Josh Reynolds or the limited Trent Cutler. Keating is the favourite but Romelo is the best option, providing some defensive stoutness and a modicum of creativity with the ball in hand. Keating tries hard but simply isn't a playmaker or an 80-minute first grade option.

Halfback ----- 6

There is no doubt 2011 was disappointing for both Trent Hodkinson and Canterbury. After a thrilling debut season with Manly, Hodkinson signed a big-money deal with the Bulldogs but certainly didn't live up to his billing, recording only 10 try assists in 22 games. There were a number of excuses: no five-eighth, an overwhelmed forward pack, second-year syndrome, coaching uncertainty, a slow backline. But there are legitimate questions being asked about his ability in attack. Hodkinson was little threat running the ball, his kicking game was off and he rarely sparked the backline. The hiring of Des Hasler offers hope Hodkinson will rediscover his old form but there is no question that the Bulldogs No.7 is on the hot seat this year.

Hooker ----- 8

Michael Ennis, the New South Wales hooker for the last three years, has been appointed the new captain of Canterbury and with the title come great expectations. Ennis is capable of some fine play – he was exceptional in 2009 and was in fine form before going down with a season ending injury in 2011 – but he is prone to dumb decision-making. Also against him are a poor kicking game and his slowness out of dummy half. His great flaw is his inability to realise his limitations. If he becomes more self-aware and plays to his strengths – sound defence, good direction, sharp playmaking – then he is one of the best rakes in the game. If not, he will only hold the Bulldogs back.

Prop ----- 8.5

Canterbury have recruited exceptionally well at prop by signing 21-Test English veteran James Graham. At 26, Graham, who won the 2008 Man of Steel award and has already played 220 top-grade games with St Helens, is at the peak of his powers. A renowned workhorse, Graham has the ability to go 80 minutes and record 140/35-quality numbers. He is going to thrive in the NRL much like Gareth Ellis has. He will be partnered by fellow shaggy blonde Aiden Tolman. Tolman was outstanding in his first season at Canterbury and it says more about Ricky Stuart and his advisors than it does about Tolman that the bustling Bulldog was overlooked for Origin last year. Arguably the best available prop at New South Wales' disposal, Tolman was without question the Bulldogs' best player in 2011, averaging 130 metres and 35 tackles a match. He is a star in the making and could become the best prop in the NRL. The stocks drop off after Graham and Tolman though. Sam Kasiano is a beast of a human with plenty of upside but fitness and common sense

are major issues with him. Greg Eastwood returned to the Bulldogs last year but was terrible as he battled wrist injuries. Martin Taupau has potential but will need to come on. Expect the two-starters to both play around 60 minutes a match this year.

Backrow ----- 6

Backrow has been a major worry for Canterbury over the last two seasons with the depth at the position set to be tested even further with the retirement of skipper Andrew Ryan. There is no questioning the ability of lock David Stagg. He is an underrated champion. A tackling machine with an ability to ball-play, Stagg has made a name on doing the unfashionable things. Hopefully he will be used as an 80-minute player for the entire season this year. Second row is a concern though with the inconsistent Frank Pritchard and youngster Jake Foster the likely starters. Pritchard is 28 now and anyone expecting him to change his spots is a fool. The change of environment did nothing to improve his game as the talented backrower again turned up only once every six weeks. Jake Foster has only 10 games experience and while a decent prospect, he is no game-winner. Corey Payne and Dene Halatau, both sub-average players, will serve as backups. Promising youngster Dale Finucane may get a chance this year. He is a future starter, for sure, and it will come down to his development.

Blue Chip Players: 3- David Stagg (backrow), James Graham (prop), Aiden Tolman (prop)

Coach Rating: Des Hasler (1st season at Canterbury, 9th in the NRL) ----- 8.5

Coach History:

W-L Record: 122-84

Finals Record: 8-6

Finals Seasons: 7

Premierships: 2

Club Record: 0-0

Coach Analysis: Chief executive Todd Greenberg pulled off one of the greatest coaching coups in rugby league history by luring the reigning premiership coach to Belmore. Des Hasler, a two-time title winning mentor, was scheduled to arrive at Canterbury in 2013 with Jim Dymock to bridge the gap in 2012 but after falling out with the Manly board, Hasler was fired and has arrived a year early. He has brought with him a number of key support staff including assistant Kelly Egan, recruitment manager Noel Cleal and sprint coach Clayton Kearney. He has immediately made changes to Canterbury's season preparation, bring greater length and more intensity to the training track. There is no doubting Hasler's credentials as a first grade coach with the former Manly mentor now legitimately in the discussion with Craig Bellamy and Wayne Bennett as the best coach of the last decade. He has only once missed the finals (his debut season, where he inherited a 14th-placed team),

has coached in the Grand Final three of the last five years and has a top-three win record over the last eight years. He is a fine producer of talent and has a strong belief in sports science, something that is sure to reap rewards at the financially strong Canterbury. The Bulldogs' best players have underperformed over the last two seasons but that is unlikely to happen under Hasler, who often gets the best out of his stars (the Stewart brothers), young players (Daly Cherry-Evans, Kieran Foran) and aging journeymen (Joe Galuvao, Shane Rodney). Expect Canterbury to be far more professional under the Hasler regime than they have been under Dymock, Kevin Moore and even Steve Folkes. If there is one knock on Hasler, it is his blinding loyalty to certain players and ideas (the two hookers!) but starting afresh, that is not expected to be an issue early at Canterbury. Hasler's signing is the most important of any club in the competition with the exception of Newcastle winning the signature of Wayne Bennett.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	12-12	9th	5-3	2-6	5-3	DNQ	--	
2010	9-15	13th	3-5	3-5	3-5	DNQ	--	
2009	18-6	2nd	7-1	5-3	6-2	1-1		Preliminary Final
2008	5-19	16th	3-5	2-6	0-8	DNQ	--	
2007	12-12	6th	4-4	4-4	4-4	0-2		Semi Final

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	18-6	2nd	5-3	7-1	6-2	3-0		Premiers
2010	12-12	8th	5-3	3-5	4-4	0-1		Qualifying Final
2009	14-10	5th	2-6	6-2	6-2	0-1		Qualifying Final
2008	17-7	2nd	5-3	7-1	5-3	3-0		Premiers
2007	18-6	2nd	7-1	5-3	6-2	2-1		Grand Final

Draw Analysis: Canterbury have been traditionally decent starters and that sits well with new coach Des Hasler, whose sides nearly always fly out of the blocks due to a heavy focus on fitness in the offseason. Hasler significantly upped Canterbury's training regime and that will reap rewards early. Avoiding form slumps is also key as Canterbury don't recover from poor runs. Hasler has only had teams go less than 4-4 twice in the last five seasons. The Bulldogs open the season with only two home games in the seven matches before the representative bye with three interstate trips mixed in. The Bulldogs play three of the four preliminary finalists from last year in the first eight weeks. Worth noting is the fact Canterbury play three day games from rounds three to five. After a tough start, Canterbury get some relief from rounds 9 to 14 where they play five non-finalists from 2011 before a bye in round 14 (before

Origin II). Canterbury will get the Sharks without Paul Gallen prior to Origin I. Canterbury's second bye comes in round 17 before Origin III. The Bulldogs get five home games in their last eight matches and avoid going any further than Canberra in that period – indeed, aside from Canberra they do not travel interstate after their round seven clash in Melbourne (and for the purposes of this guide, Canberra is not considered interstate). Des Hasler's team will play five finalists between round 20 and 24 before winnable games at Canberra and against the Roosters. The 2012 fixture presents a tough start for Canterbury but if they can overcome that then they can entrench themselves in the eight throughout the Origin period, giving themselves a chance of returning to the finals with a big home-stand.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	12-12	8-4	4-8
2010	9-15	4-8	5-7
2009	19-7	12-2	7-5
2008	5-19	3-9	2-10
2007	12-14	4-9	8-5
Five-Year Total	57-67	31-32	26-35

Home and Away Analysis: Canterbury seemingly goes into every season handicapped by the lack of a home field advantage. Canterbury have had good years at Stadium Australia but in three of the last five seasons they have failed to win more than four games at the monstrosity of a home ground. The Bulldogs have traditionally been one of the more competent road teams but have only managed to go 26-35 when not the designated home team since 2007 and 20-30 when being forced to travel away from Stadium Australia as the away team.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	10th	12th	2nd	16th	4th
Metres	13th	8th	10th	16th	9th
Offloads	5th	10th	6th	13th	7th
Tackle Breaks	12th	2nd	4th	15th	7th
Errors	12th	8th	12th	15th	12th

Defence Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	9th	12th	3rd	16th	9th
Metres Conceded	16th	14th	12th	16th	6th
Missed Tackles	7th	13th	15th	16th	13th

Attack-Defence Ranking Analysis: Statistically, the 2008 Canterbury team may be one of the worst teams of the NRL Era, ranking in the bottom four of every category measure here with a top ranking of 13th in offloads, the least important stat category. Last year, Canterbury struggled in all attacking metrics with the exception of offloads, not ranking in the top 10 for any of the major four categories. Particularly worrying has been Canterbury's handling, where they have ranked 12th or worse in errors in four of the last five years. No Des Hasler team has finished worse than fifth in handling errors over the last four years. In the years Canterbury have made the finals, they have not dropped out the bottom in points allowed and metres conceded but while points conceded improved to mid-range, metres conceded was the worst in the league with Canterbury finishing bottom-five in the stat in the last four seasons. Canterbury's once revered defence is soft up the middle and until that is rectified then the Bulldogs won't be threatening for the title. Missed tackles improved last year, one defensive positive for Canterbury.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	Ben Barba	23
2010	Ben Barba	15
2009	Josh Morris	22
2008	Heka Nanai	13
2007	Sonny Bill Williams	14

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 34 (1st) 2011 Key Position: 17 (9th)
2010: 39 (3rd)

Games Lost Analysis: The good news for Canterbury is that they have had a very good run with injuries over the last two years, ranking the healthiest and most disciplined in the competition this year and third in 2010. The bad news: the Bulldogs could not make the finals in either season, suggesting a weak strongest line-up. While the Bulldogs had a good run with injuries last year, they lost their most important player in Michael Ennis to a serious neck injury. With Trent Hodkinson taking a suspension and problems at five-eighth, there was little continuity in the key positions all season. Josh Morris, David Stagg and Aiden Tolman all missed patches

with injury while bench forward Greg Eastwood battled wrist damage throughout the year and played just 15 mostly ineffective matches.

2011 Betting Analysis: Canterbury turned around being a 10-14 covers loser in 2010 to being a 14-10 covers winner last season. Those betting them every game in head-to-head markets for \$1 lost \$1.74 but that was primarily a result of the -\$5.22 road result with home games netting \$3.48 profit. Despite not having a strong home ground advantage, Canterbury went 9-3 against the number at home last year, going 4-1 ATS as a home favourite and 5-2 ATS as a home underdog. The Bulldogs were remarkably strong as a favourite, going 8-3 ATS when fancied by punters. As a road underdog, Canterbury were 1-5 against the line and 0-3 when travelling interstate, making them 4-10 ATS as a road outsider over the last two years. Canterbury covered seven of eight times when favoured by six or fewer points. As an underdog of less than six points, the Bulldogs were 4-7 ATS. An 11-6 ATS record in the dry was a turnaround from 2010. Canterbury were the only team to have a shorter average road price than home price. The Bulldogs were a marginal under team in 2011, going 13-11 under the total, but had very few trends with their most dominant being a 7-2 under when playing on Friday night and 2-0 under off the bye. Canterbury didn't have a game total 61 or more last year, down from two the year before.

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$16.00

Minor Premiership: \$15.00

Top 4: \$3.50

Top 8: \$1.50

The Bookmaker: "Des Hasler is a super addition to the club but I think he will need 12 months to make his mark."

-Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

Mr Rugby Assessment: The Doggies are certainly full of confidence and their bite historically matches their bark when they enter a season in such a mood. I regard them as a strong side 1-17 but are perhaps lacking the two-to-three class acts that generally secure premiership triumphs. Price: \$17.00

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 51 (equal 12th)

Weighted Roster Rating: 64.5 (12th)

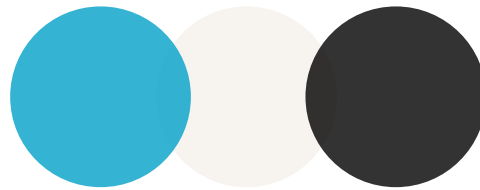
Predicted Finishing Range: 5th-14th

Predicted Finish: 12th

The expectations are big at Belmore now Des Hasler is the new sheriff in town but it would seem unlikely, given Canterbury's roster, that the Bulldogs will challenge for the top four. Canterbury missed the finals for consecutive years for the first time in two decades last year but still managed 12 wins with the Bulldogs winning 10 or more games every year bar four since 1968. The long-term culture at the club is strong but in more recent times it has been tested. That has manifested itself, primarily, in poor defence and a lack of discipline. Hasler will certainly right the ship and eradicate these poor habits. Hasler coached teams are traditionally strong handlers and he does not tolerate poor tackling or bad defensive reads. A believer in the Moneyball-approach, significant improvement is expected from the Canterbury roster but that does not cover from the deficiencies in the roster, most notably concerns at the key positions, a lack of pace out wide and major depth issues in the pack. Canterbury certainly can make the finals. If James Graham and Aiden Tolman stay healthy and play at a high level, Trent Hodkinson rediscovers his 2010 form and Ben Barba becomes more reliable at the back, the Bulldogs can make the finals, particularly if the bit players all improve enough under Hasler. But the likely scenario is that questionable halves play, worries in the backrow and a distinct lack of tryscoring punch out wide will hurt the Bulldogs, particularly with a defence that has been poor in recent years. A tough draw and poor road form don't help. There is ability there at Canterbury but perhaps not enough this year. Hasler will prove the redeemer of the Canterbury faithful. I'm just not sure the day of salvation will fall in 2012.

2012 Betting Advice: The futures markets all seem about right on Canterbury. Bookmakers question the Bulldogs' roster but are, as most analysts concur, high on Des Hasler. The one market that should interest punters regarding Canterbury is the Bulldogs to miss the eight. Sportingbet is offering \$2.10 and while that is perhaps a touch short, Canterbury will need plenty to go right to make the finals for the first time since 2009. Those looking to play them in premiership betting should wait until after round eight as the Bulldogs have another tough start to the year. A lack of genuine home field advantage make Canterbury tough to gauge as weekly betting propositions. One situation to avoid is Canterbury as a road underdog, particularly interstate. In terms of total points betting, the only situation to really note is that Canterbury are 22-15 under over the last two years when playing at night so look for that play throughout the season, particularly against other low scoring teams.

CRONULLA SHARKS



Strongest Team

1. Nathan Gardner (fb)
2. John Williams (w)
3. Colin Best (c/w)
4. Stewart Mills (c/w/fb)
5. Isaac Gordon (w/fb)
6. Albert Kelly (hb/fe/fb)
7. Todd Carney (hb/fe)
13. Wade Graham (fe/br)
12. Paul Gallen (br)
11. Jeremy Smith (br)
10. Bryce Gibbs (p)
9. Isaac De Gois (h)
8. Ben Ross (p)

-
14. Andrew Fifita (p)
 15. Anthony Tupou (br)
 16. Sam Tagataese (p/br/c)
 17. John Morris (h/hb)

Others: Mark Taufua (p/br), Jon Green (p), Chad Townsend (hb), Jeff Robson (hb), Nathan Stapleton (fb/w), Josh Cordoba (p), Ben Pomeroy (c), Kose Lelei (fe/c/w), Matthew Wright (c), Jason Bukuya (br), Ricky Leutele (c), Matt Parata (w/c), Tyson Frizell (br), Sosaia Feki (c/fb), Tyrone Peachey (br), Callum Tutuaha (c)

Gains: Todd Carney (Roosters), Isaac De Gois (Newcastle), Ben Ross (South Sydney), Bryce Gibbs (Wests Tigers), Andrew Fifita (Wests Tigers), Mark Taufua (Newcastle), Jeff Robson (Parramatta), Jon Green (St George-Illawarra)

Losses: Luke Douglas (Gold Coast), Kade Snowden (Newcastle), Paul Aiton (Wakefield), Taulima Tautai (Parramatta), Tim Smith (Wakefield), Dean Collis (Wakefield), Ryan Tongia (Wakefield), Scott Porter (Released), Jon Mannah (Parramatta), Broderick Wright (Released), Stuart Flanagan (Released), Andrew Clayton (Released), Guy Borgas (Released)

Net Recruitment Assessment: Only time will tell if Cronulla's signing of Todd Carney will end in disaster or if it will be one of the club's great recruitment moves. What is certain is that the recidivist half is the club's biggest recruit since Nigel Vagana in 2004 and the most important signing of a half since Chris Anderson brought in Brett Kimmorley and Matthew Johns in 2002. To be fair to Cronulla, the Sharks have had a great problem recruiting quality players so the risk is probably worth it. They at least have a competent halfback now, a rare genuine match-winner.

Carney will be joined by quality rake Isaac De Gois, halfback Jeff Robson and prop forwards Ben Ross, Andrew Fifita, Bryce Gibbs, Mark Taufua and Jon Green. Picking up De Gois is an upgrade at hooker but even if the new props do play to their best, they are a major downgrade for Cronulla after the Sharks lost Luke Douglas and Kade Snowden. Douglas and Snowden have been two of Cronulla's three best players over the last half-decade and one of the best front row tandems in the game. Douglas, in particular, has been one of the few shining lights for Cronulla since he debuted in 2006 with his longevity worthy of particular note. He is irreplaceable. Cutting deadwood like Tim Smith, Dean Collis and Broderick Wright will do the Sharks no damage. There is no doubt that Cronulla have bought a match-winner in Carney along with more forward depth but they are going to feel the loss of Douglas and Snowden intensely.

Representative Losses: (Likely) Paul Gallen. (Possible) Todd Carney, Jeremy Smith.

Position Ratings:

Fullback ----- 5.5

Nathan Gardner regressed badly in his second season, making 32 handling errors, even getting dropped at one stage. It was most disappointing after a scintillating debut season.

His courage can't be doubted but his application, his handling and even his size are worrying. He can bounce back and will have the inside running for the job but pressure from Isaac Gordon, Nathan Stapleton and Stewart Mills could see him lose the No.1 if he doesn't come out firing. With Todd Carney at the club, Gardner may improve without the pressure of being the team's key attacking weapon.

Three Quarters ----- 2.5

The Cronulla three-quarter line is the clear worst in the league and the Sharks recruitment team has done nothing to improve it. So heinous is Cronulla's attack that not a single Shark has scored double-figure tries since Luke Covell scored 15 in 2008. The club has no match-winners out wide. Colin Best is 33 and has scored only 14 tries in 66 games over the last three seasons. He will be partnered in the centres by either Ben Pomeroy - who has the worst hands in the NRL - or Stewart Mills, the local junior who has five top grade games on the wing. The wingers will be Cowboys discard John Williams, Isaac Gordon, who has only 19 games at 25 years of age, or Nathan Stapleton, who has scored just five tries in 33 games. In short, the backline lacks pace, class and tryscoring nous.

Five-Eighth ----- 5

The Cronulla halves situation is extremely murky at writing with Todd Carney, Wade Graham, Jeff Robson, Albert Kelly and Chad Townsend all fighting for positions. I have projected Albert Kelly to win the No.6 jersey (with Carney wearing No.7 and Graham No.13) if he can stay out of trouble off the paddock. Kelly showed significant

improvement under Shane Flanagan in 2011 and can score a try but he is an instinct player with limited abilities to help teammates. Even though he is the third best five-eighth at the club (Carney rates 7.5, Graham 6.5), playing Kelly in the No.6 jersey is best for the balance of the team. Cronulla lack a livewire and Kelly is just that.

Halfback ----- 7.5

There is no question that based on on-field showings alone, the recruitment of Todd Carney is a boon for the Sharks. He is the club's most talented halfback since Brett Kimmorley, providing the long-suffering Sharks faithful with a creative playmaker, an elite backline talent and a genuine match-winner. The Dally M Medal winner only two years back, Carney dragged a fair Roosters team to the Grand Final. But he is such a mess off the field that it would seem long odds that he will be able to get himself fit and keep himself out of trouble to play. He is also viewed as a bad seed who not only distracts other players but takes them right off the rails. Surely this is Carney's last chance so the Sharks may get one last season out of the top-class talent.

Hooker ----- 7

After three years at Newcastle, Isaac De Gois returns to Cronulla and will reclaim the No.9 jersey from John Morris, who will shift to the bench and share minutes with De Gois while also being used as a backrower. De Gois played his best football at Cronulla and should get more time back at the Sharks. Quick out of dummy half and with a good work ethic, De Gois gives Cronulla some creativity around the ruck that they desperately need. Morris is an honest type but provides little in attack.

Prop ----- 6

Outside of Paul Gallen, the heart and soul of Cronulla over the last half-decade was prop combination Luke Douglas and Kade Snowden. Both signed elsewhere in the offseason, forcing Cronulla to go on a prop-purchasing frenzy that has done little to fill the holes left by two genuinely classy prop forwards. Bryce Gibbs and Ben Ross shape as the likely starters. Both bring experience and both are capable but neither are much better than average. Andrew Fifita has plenty of upside and is a tackle break machine but allegedly fell out with Tigers coach Tim Sheens and did not play after round 19. Depending on how coachable he is, he could be one for the future. Mark Taufua, Jon Green and Josh Cordoba are all honest types but are all fringe first graders at best. The best thing that can be said about the Sharks' prop rotation is that it has depth, even if it lacks class.

Backrow ----- 8

Paul Gallen is unquestionably the best forward in the game and was close to the best player in 2011. He does an outstanding job on a bad team and is without question the most valuable forward in the game. He is just a machine, making 185 metres a game last year, nearly 50 metres more than the second-ranked forward. He is a brutal defender, an inspirational leader and probably Cronulla's most important attacking weapon with his offloading and ability to bust tackles. The Mayor

of Wentworthville will win Cronulla games on his own. Jeremy Smith is a pretty handy sidekick. The Kiwi international went well for the Sharks in his first year at the club. He adds some real starch to the Sharks' defence. Wade Graham projects as the lock (though he is likely to play in the halves). Graham is a burly type with nice playmaking skills – think Braith Anasta – who can give Cronulla a desperately needed extra ballplaying option if tried in the forwards. He has a lovely pass but needs to take the line on more. Former international Anthony Tupou is no better than a bench option these days. Lazy and ineffective, he will do well to see out the season in the top grade. Sam Tagataese was good after transferring from the Gold Coast mid-season and is a likely bench option while Jason Bukuya is a strong tackler who should start if Graham does don the No.6 jersey. Backrow is one area Shane Flanagan does not have to worry about.

Blue Chip Players: 1- Paul Gallen (backrow)

Coach Rating: Shane Flanagan (3rd season at Cronulla, 3rd in the NRL) ----- **3**

Coach History:

W-L Record: 9-22

Finals Record: 0-0

Finals Seasons: 0

Premierships: 0

Club Record: 9-22

Coach Analysis: There is no doubt that 2012 will be the pivotal year in Shane Flanagan's coaching career. If the Sharks continue to be mired in mediocrity, the low-profile Flanagan, in the final year of his contract, will be out with little fuss or fanfare. Flanagan has also stuck his neck out to sign Todd Carney with any negativity coming from that signing sure to come back and bite the Sharks boss. The Sharks have certainly improved under Flanagan relative to how the club played under Ricky Stuart: attacking indicators are improved, recruitment has been marginally up, the style of play has significantly more upside. But Flanagan learned at the feet of Stuart and the result is that his improvements have only been at the fringes. The Sharks' 2011 season followed a similar pattern to those of previous years, starting poorly, having a decent middle of the year and then finishing abysmally. Scoring was again an issue but perhaps the most damning case against Flanagan comes from Cronulla's defence in their last four road games, where they allowed 38 against the Dragons, 46 against Brisbane, 36 against the Roosters and 28 against the Cowboys. Flanagan is going to need to roll the dice this year to save his job. Former Manly/Northern Eagles coach Peter Sharp has come in as an assistant in an attempt to position himself as the successor but the likelihood is the Sharks will look outside to someone such as Steve Folkes or Nathan Brown if Flanagan cannot significantly improve the Sharks early in 2012.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	7-17	13th	2-6	5-3	0-8	DNQ	--	
2010	7-17	14th	2-6	3-5	2-6	DNQ	--	
2009	5-19	15th	1-7	4-4	0-8	DNQ	--	
2008	17-7	3rd	5-3	6-2	6-2	1-1		Preliminary Final
2007	10-14	11th	4-4	3-5	3-5	DNQ	--	

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	7-17	13th	2-6	5-3	0-8	DNQ	--	
2010	2-5	14th	*	*	2-5	DNQ	--	

Draw Analysis: Cronulla have been the worst performed team in the NRL over the last five seasons. They have tended to start poorly, show some fight in the middle stages and then collapse in a heap over the last two months. Three times in the last six years Cronulla have failed to find a win over the last two months of the season and over the last three years they have opened a combined 5-19 over their first eight games. Such is the strength of their pattern that it is hard to see it changing this year. Cronulla play four finalists from 2011 in the opening four rounds. Their byes come in rounds 12 and 16, not particularly helpful for a team that requires Paul Gallen. He will be missing in round 11 against Canterbury, round 14 against the Titans and round 17 against the Broncos. The Sharks get four home and four away in their last eight but must travel to Auckland and Melbourne over that period. Newcastle, Melbourne and North Queensland is not an easy finish to the year. More of the same for Cronulla in 2012 draw wise: tough start, winnable games during Origin, fair finish but one that gets hard if injuries hit.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	7-17	4-8	3-9
2010	7-17	4-8	3-9
2009	5-19	3-9	2-10
2008	18-8	10-3	8-5
2007	10-14	5-7	5-7
Five-Year Total	47-75	26-35	21-40

Home and Away Analysis: Cronulla have generally been about a one win per season better team at home than away. The Sharks have been generally terrible though, finding winning anywhere difficult, Cronulla having only a 38.5% strike rate over the last five years. Shark Park certainly isn't the fortress it was in the 1990s with a win rate of only 42.6% since 2007.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	12th	16th	16th	15th	11th
Metres	15th	15th	15th	6th	2nd
Offloads	4th	2nd	7th	11th	2nd
Tackle Breaks	4th	13th	12th	12th	2nd
Errors	3rd	13th	16th	11th	8th

Defence Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	13th	15th	13th	3rd	3rd
Metres Conceded	12th	12th	10th	5th	5th
Missed Tackles	8th	6th	11th	12th	8th

Attack-Defence Ranking Analysis: To the surprise of many, Cronulla's attack improved significantly under Shane Flanagan in his first year in charge. While metres gained and offloads remained constant and points scored improved only marginally, tackle breaks and handling improved markedly. The Sharks were more dangerous with the ball in hand, particularly outside the red-zone and they were more disciplined with the pill. The challenge for Flanagan this offseason is to get the Sharks scoring more – Cronulla have not had a tryscorer rack up 10 tries since 2008. He certainly recognises this and has brought in former AFL player Nick Davis to help with the kicking, a major reason behind Cronulla's lack of scoring. Little changed defensively for Cronulla last year, who were bottom-four in points conceded for the third straight year. The Sharks have long been regarded as "honest defenders" but a look at the numbers over the last three years suggests that is far from true though they have finished in the top half of missed tackle rates the last two years.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	Ben Pomeroy	9
2010	Nathan Gardner	8
2009	Blake Ferguson	9
2008	Luke Covell	15
2007	Ben Pomeroy	12

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 51 (4th) 2011 Key Position: 25 (14th)

2010: 32 (2nd)

Games Lost Analysis: Health again wasn't an issue with the Sharks, perhaps exemplified best by Luke Douglas, who played a week after sustaining medial ligament damage to his knee that sidelines human players for a usual six weeks. The most serious injury was no doubt star prop Kade Snowden, who played 20 games but many under an injury cloud. Skipper Paul Gallen also missed four games due to Origin and injury. Key position injuries were a problem with Nathan Gardner missing six games, John Morris five and Albert Kelly 14 with a broken leg.

2011 Betting Analysis: Cronulla were once again highly unpopular with punters, starting favourites in only four games after not starting favourite once in 2010. Their average price of \$2.46 was down from \$3.15 in 2010 but they still received 6 ½ or more points in 13 matches. Cronulla were winning propositions when bet head-to-head at Shark Park, up \$1.28 if \$1 was put on each home match. That form did not translate to handicap betting though, where they went 5-7 ATS at home. Over the course of the year, Cronulla were 11-13 ATS, taking them to 21-27 ATS over the last two years. They were particularly strong interstate, covering three of four times when outside of NSW. The Sharks were also good when getting 13-plus, covering three of four times. One turnaround from 2010 was their form in the day, where they went from 0-5 ATS to 5-2 against the line last year. Wet weather form was a major issue for Cronulla, who went 1-5 ATS when matches were rain affected. Cronulla became an over team last year, going 14-10 against the bookmakers' line, led by a 10-2 over record on the road. Over the last two years, despite their reputation as a dour team, Cronulla are 17-7 over away from Shark Park. The 12-8 over record in good weather takes Cronulla to a 22-16 over record when the rains have stayed away over the last two years.

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$34.00

Minor Premiership: \$41.00

Top 4: \$8.00

Top 8: \$3.00

The Bookmaker: "Losing Kade Snowden was a massive loss and Todd Carney is one indiscretion away from being the all-time bad boy of Australian sport. Can't afford a single injury. Not for me."

-Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

Mr Rugby Assessment: This tight-knit squad will fancy their chances. A few handy acquisitions combined with the presence of Paul Gallen and the emergence of some local juniors means they will not be easybeats when at full strength. Their depth is questionable though. Price: \$28.00

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 45 (15th)

Weighted Roster Rating: 56.5 (15th)

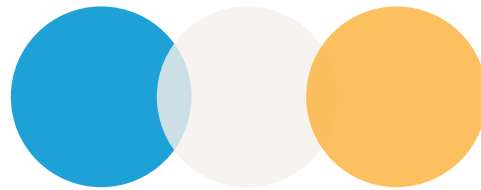
Predicted Finishing Range: 11th-16th

Predicted Finish: 15th

It would be premature to suggest Cronulla have steadied the ship. It would be stupid to suggest that the Sharks' 46th year will be the year it all finally happens. The club, of course, has major problems. There is no chief executive. Financial stresses are unlikely to get any better with the much-vaunted redevelopment a very real chance of not progressing. The coach is in the final year of his deal. They were net losers in recruitment and will have been hammered if Todd Carney does not work out. They lack genuine class. They are a team incapable of scoring tries. The problems are plentiful. But unlike the last few seasons, there is a glimmer of hope at Shark Park. In Carney, they have a player with upside, one who may be able to spark the attack into something better than the insipid mess it has been the last few years. If it is possible, Paul Gallen got even better last year and is at the peak of his powers. The return of Isaac De Gois provides some sharpness around the ruck. The idea of finals football is a long way off. Years. But at least Cronulla seem to have some upside and some kind of interest in scoring points. If they can just start fairly and not fall away at the end of the season, get themselves to nine or ten wins, 2012 should be considered a success for a team limited in so many ways.

2012 Betting Advice: Cronulla are really only strong betting propositions when getting big starts. They have been only fair in most handicap situations and while usually overpriced marginally at home, they are unreliable. One situation that should interest punters is betting the over when the Sharks are away from home. No Cronulla player should be considered in any top try scorer futures bets while the Sharks offer no value in premiership or finals betting. The \$6 about for the wooden spoon is about right.

GOLD COAST TITANS



Strongest Team

1. William Zillman (fb/w/c/fe)
2. Kevin Gordon (w)
3. Beau Champion (c)
4. Jamal Idris (c/br)
5. David Mead (w)
6. Beau Henry (fe/hb)
7. Scott Prince (hb)
13. Ashley Harrison (br)
12. Greg Bird (br/fe)
11. Nate Myles (br/p)
10. Luke Douglas (p)
9. Matt Srama (h)
8. Luke Bailey (p)

-
14. Kayne Lawton (h)
 15. Mark Minichiello (br)
 16. Matt White (p)
 17. Ryan James (p)

Others: Phil Graham (w/c/fb), Bodene Thompson (br/c), Aiden Sezer (fe), Steve Michaels (c/w), Brenton Lawrence (p), Ben Ridge (br), Michael Henderson (p), Luke O'Dwyer (br/c), Jordan Rankin (hb/fb), Joe Vickory (w/c), Dominique Peyroux (w/c), Beau Falloon (h), Jamie Dowling (br), Javarn White (fb), Luke Page (br/p), Cody Nelson (br/fe), Anthony Don (fb/w)

Gains: Luke Douglas (Cronulla), Jamal Idris (Canterbury), Nate Myles (Sydney Roosters), Beau Champion (Melbourne), Phil Graham (Sydney Roosters), Aiden Sezer (Canterbury), Beau Falloon (South Sydney)

Losses: Nathan Friend (New Zealand), Anthony Laffranchi (St Helens), Preston Campbell (Retired), Mat Rogers (Retired), Brad Meyers (Retired), Clinton Toopi (Retired), Joseph Tomane (Rugby Union), Luke Capewell (Brisbane), Shannon Walker (Rugby Union), Esi Tonga (Parramatta), Will Matthews (St George-Illawarra)

Net Recruitment Assessment: The broom has been well and truly put through the Titans with foundation players Anthony Laffranchi, Preston Campbell, Brad Meyers and Nathan Friend all moving on or retiring while most of the abhorrent centres that the club was burdened with in 2011 – Clinton Toopi, Joseph Tomane, Esi Tonga - are gone. The chequebook has been opened to find their replacements with internationals Jamal Idris and Nate Myles signing on with the superb Luke Douglas and potential-filled Beau Champion. Idris and Champion are major upgrades at

centre, giving the Titans some much-needed spark. Douglas and Myles add some real class to the forward pack. The Titans finished with the wooden spoon in 2011 but with their offseason purchasing they should be dramatic improvers in 2012.

Representative Losses: (Likely) Ashley Harrison, Greg Bird, Nate Myles.
(Possible) Scott Prince, Jamal Idris, Luke Douglas.

Position Ratings:

Fullback ----- 4

Fullback is a disaster for the Titans and one area they did not upgrade in the offseason spending spree, meaning William Zillman will likely get the job with Phil Graham and Jordan Rankin shaping as challengers. For all Zillman's zeal, he simply has never recovered from two serious knee injuries sustained in Canberra. He can show flashes of brilliance but he has lost at least a couple of steps, is unreliable under the high ball, is not an overly creative playmaker and is a below average kick returner. Rankin was tried a couple of times last year but got hooked by Cartwright in one match, so much did he struggle. Graham might be the best bet. He hasn't played a lot of fullback but he is speedy and will at least ensure a competent kick return.

Three Quarters ----- 8

A combination of horrendous personnel and bad luck saw the Titans' three-quarter line look, for the most part, pathetic in 2011. Big changes were needed and big changes were made with a host of heinous centres in Clinton Toopi, Joseph Tomane and Esi Tonga all gone and Steve Michaels destined to play plenty of Queensland Cup. In are international Jamal Idris and strong runner Beau Champion, along with experienced utility Phil Graham. Signing Idris to a five-year deal was not a smart move but he has reportedly stripped down and there is no doubt he is a beast who is very difficult to tackle. Champion, who will need to move to the left side, was an incredible disappointment at the Storm as he let homesickness and a disjointed preparation get to him but closer to family he can return to the form that had him touted as a potential Origin option. His line running is exceptional when his mind is on football. The wing situation is a lot more stable with promising speedsters Kevin Gordon and David Mead sure to start on the flanks. Gordon managed only two games last season before going down with a serious knee injury but had scored 25 tries in the two seasons previous. Mead came of age last season with 16 tries including one of the tries of the season when picking up the ball on his hip and diving over in the corner. His kick return also improved significantly, getting up over 110 metres per match. Graham is 30 years old but still has plenty of toe and has 79 tries in 145 games. No longer will the Titans be able to be exploited out wide in defence and let down in the same area in attack.

Five-Eighth ----- 4.5

Hopefully common sense will prevail and Greg Bird will be kept in the backrow and away from the No.6 jersey. Bird is a rep level player but he really stymies Gold Coast's attack and offers virtually nothing if Scott Prince is off-song, as was the case in 2011. His poor handling only complicates matters. Beau Henry should be given a full season to prove himself. Henry was playing at a decent level with Newcastle before being shunted to the Titans midseason, unable to recapture his form up north after his confidence took a battering. He is highly regarded and has the tools to be a quality NRL playmaker but he is going to need to come of age in 2012. Pushing him will be new recruit Aiden Sezer, who was highly regarded at Canterbury. William Zillman is the player being touted in the press as the frontrunner though. Zillman has a decent touch but with the dearth of fullbacks at the club, he should be used at the back.

Halfback ----- 8

Turning 31 before last season, Prince suffered a dramatic downswing in form, one of the main reasons the Titans went from preliminary finalists to wooden spooners. Prince managed only 13 try assists in 19 games last year, battling niggling injuries throughout. He has now dropped out of the elite halfback class and is, at best, a very good No.7. The Titans are going to need him if they are to turn things around but there are significant question marks over whether Prince will ever again be effective. Was 2011 an aberration or was it a Matt Orford like career-ender? Probably the former but there is no question that Prince is no longer the top-line playmaker he was only two years back. Concerns over his relationship with Greg Bird only add to worries about his form and future.

Hooker ----- 7

The decision to let excellent hooker Nathan Friend walk to the Warriors became more understandable late in the season when Matt Srama hit the scene. In a similar mould to Friend, Srama averaged more than 38 tackles a game, being an extremely reliable middle-third defender. He needs to improve his attacking game, getting out from dummy half more, but there is plenty of upside there and it would not be surprising if he propelled himself into the top handful of hookers under Cameron Smith this season.

Prop ----- 8.5

It became apparent very early on last year that the Titans needed both a roster overhaul and a culture shift. The Titans needed a prop to help Luke Bailey now, a hard nut and a heavy worker, as well as someone they can build around in the future. They got that with Luke Douglas, the ex-Shark who has played 146 straight games since debuting in 2006. Last year he came back from a strained MCL - which should have kept him out for six weeks - the next weekend. Douglas regularly averages 100 metres and 30 tackles a game and did so again last year. It is a rugby league tragedy that he is continually overlooked for rep duty. He will do an outstanding job for the Titans. He will combine with Luke Bailey, who himself averaged 33 tackles and 120-plus metres a game in 2011. He may be 32 but is playing as well as he

ever has, winning his third Paul Broughton Medal last season. Giving up rep football has extended his club career. The third prop in the rotation is no doubt thumping youngster Ryan James. James, 20, has 18 games under his belt and it is obvious he loves the physical stuff. He is still raw-boned and he is returning from a ruptured ACL that will keep him out a month but he has plenty of potential. Matt White and Michael Henderson both work hard but will need to find another level on their 2011 efforts. New recruit Nate Myles could play up front but should be used in the backrow.

Backrow ----- 8

Intent on maintaining a representative quality backrow, Gold Coast signed Roosters forward Nate Myles to replace former international Anthony Laffranchi. Myles was one of the best forwards in the NRL in 2010 but found himself back on the drink in 2011 and his form slipped accordingly. He has shown he can perform at an elite level but he cannot be relied on to do so. Second row partner Greg Bird is similar. He is tough as nails and can make a noise in attack but his hands are so poor that he can be a real liability on off nights. He is another player who needs to realise his own limitations. Ashley Harrison is the incumbent Queensland lock and one of the most honest players in the game. He tackles all day and does enough with the ball. Mark Minichiello will, not before time, revert to the bench. He can hit a hole but has shocking hands that won't get any better. Bodene Thompson is rated as a solid prospect but he is a shocking tackler, a terribly overrated player.

Blue Chip Players: 6- Kevin Gordon (wing), Jamal Idris (centre), Scott Prince (halfback), Ashley Harrison (backrow), Luke Bailey (prop), Luke Douglas (prop)

Coach Rating: John Cartwright (6th season at the Gold Coast, 6th in the NRL) -- **6.5**

Coach History:

W-L Record: 58-66

Finals Record: 1-3

Finals Seasons: 2

Premierships: 0

Club Record: 58-66

Coach Analysis: What to make of 2011 and coach John Cartwright's contribution to the absolute disaster. Leading into last season, it seemed that Cartwright was on his way to becoming one of the top coaches in the game. He had done an outstanding job in building the new team up to a preliminary finalist within four seasons. But last year, the Titans fell off the edge of a cliff. Many pundits were prepared to pot the Titans last year but the depth of their fall surprised many. On some level, Cartwright must take a good deal of responsibility. His team selections were often poor, he did little to provide stability in the key positions of fullback and five-eighth, he showed far too much loyalty to underperforming players and the team seemed to lack leadership. The lack of pride in the jersey must also be attributed back to the

coach. But Cartwright did have excuses. The Titans had an aging team and had little cap room to move in last year. They lost a number of key position players to injury and his senior playing group appeared divided and absconded much of their responsibility. Cartwright deserves another chance to prove himself with a rejuvenated list after four good years where, prior to last year's epic failure, the side has improved each season. And the expectation will be that he will bounce back. He has proven to be tactically astute in the past and a coach both respected and liked by his players. But despite a contract that goes through until 2015, Cartwright will be under some pressure to get this high-priced recruitment class quickly melded with the Titans style and show that the side is capable of quick improvement under his tutelage. He must also start finding the best from young players like Ryan James and Bodene Thompson to prove himself as a good developer of young talent. Assistant coach Trevor Gillmeister is highly regarded and is thought of as a real players coach.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	6-18	16th	3-5	1-7	2-6	DNQ	--	
2010	15-9	4th	6-2	3-5	6-2	1-1		Preliminary Final
2009	16-8	3rd	6-2	5-3	5-3	0-2		Semi Final
2008	10-14	13th	6-2	3-5	1-7	DNQ	--	
2007	10-14	12th	4-4	4-4	2-6	DNQ	--	

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	6-18	16th	3-5	1-7	2-6	DNQ	--	
2010	15-9	4th	6-2	3-5	6-2	1-1		Preliminary Final
2009	16-8	3rd	6-2	5-3	5-3	0-2		Semi Final
2008	10-14	13th	6-2	3-5	1-7	DNQ	--	
2007	10-14	12th	4-4	4-4	2-6	DNQ	--	

Draw Analysis: The Titans have been fast starters since entering the NRL in 2007, starting 6-2 from 2008-10 and even having their best third last year when they went 3-5. They are at home in four of their first six but get all four preliminary finalists from last year in the first eight weeks. The Titans get the opportunity to start fast but with so many new players, the team is going to need to gel quickly because the vinegar is going to be applied early. The middle of the season was a disaster for the Titans last year but they are usually fairly strong and it would not surprise to see at least three Gold Coast wins during the middle third. Gold Coast have their byes in rounds 11 and 17 and go to Cronulla before Origin II, a good deal overall. Three finalists in the last eight weeks gives the Titans every chance to finish the year off well but

they need to win away from home against poor teams at the end of the season to be a finals hope. At Canberra, at the Roosters and at Penrith in the last eight weeks are going to be incredibly important for the team's fate.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	6-18	3-9	3-9
2010	16-10	9-4	7-6
2009	16-10	11-2	5-8
2008	10-14	7-5	3-9
2007	10-14	8-4	2-10
Four-Year Total	58-66	38-24	20-42

Home and Away Analysis: The strong home-field advantage the Titans had over their first four seasons evaporated last year with the Titans going 3-9 at Skilled Stadium. Gold Coast's home record has fallen to 61.3% after last year's debacle and are 30-20 all-time at Skilled. Their road record is almost equally as poor, winning only 32.3% of road games. As the Titans improved so did their road showings, having a winning record away from home in 2010 but during last year's wooden spoon fiasco they were horrendous away.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	16th	8th	10th	11th	15th
Metres	10th	3rd	6th	13th	14th
Offloads	13th	12th	14th	15th	14th
Tackle Breaks	15th	12th	14th	14th	16th
Errors	16th	9th	9th	6th	4th

Defence Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	16th	8th	8th	12th	10th
Metres Conceded	10th	5th	9th	13th	15th
Missed Tackles	13th	11th	13th	13th	9th

Attack-Defence Ranking Analysis: The Titans have one of the more dour attacks with the Gold Coast ranking bottom-five every year in offloads and tackle breaks. That lack of creativity was offset by disciplined handling and a solid platform in the club's finals years of 2009-10 but when those metrics went dramatically backwards

last year, so did the Titans. The Gold Coast claimed the wooden spoon last year, no doubt a result of scoring the fewest points and committing the most errors. The Titans' defence was just as bad. Their missed tackle rate continued to be high while poor field position brought about by terrible handling and too many metres conceded resulted in the most points allowed in the NRL in 2011.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	David Mead	16
2010	Kevin Gordon	12
2009	Kevin Gordon	13
2008	Anthony Laffranchi	12
2007	Matt Petersen, Mat Rogers	10

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 99 (16th) 2011 Key Position: 35 (15th)
 2010: 58 (8th)

Games Lost Analysis: No team copped a bigger hammering with injury in 2011 than the wooden spoon-winning Titans. Hooker Nathan Friend missed 20 games with a shoulder injury. Queensland lock Ashley Harrison played only 13 games due to Origin and a hyper-extended elbow. Former international Anthony Laffranchi missed 10 games with an ankle concern. Speedy winger Kevin Gordon needed a knee reconstruction after only two matches. Brad Meyers was forced into retirement after only two matches. Scott Prince, Greg Bird and Preston Campbell all missed five matches. Boom young prop Ryan James ruptured his ACL and missed 10 games and will not play for the first month of 2012. Few teams would be able to handle such a horrid injury run.

2011 Betting Analysis: What a difference a year makes. One of the punters' darlings of 2010, who went 15-11 ATS and were a top play as an underdog (9-4 ATS) and as an interstate underdog (8-0 ATS), the Titans were a disaster in 2011, going a horrid 8-16 ATS. There were few positives for the team who went 5-7 ATS at home and 3-9 ATS on the road. They covered the number only twice from eight games as favourites and were an awful 3-7 ATS when given more than six points. They didn't cover in three day games and were 7-14 ATS in dry weather. Punters who placed \$1 on them every game lost \$8.55 (third worst in the NRL) with the Titans having the worst home betting record, losing \$5.25 in 12 home matches. In total points betting, the Titans went 12-12 over-under and are 26-24 under over the last two years. They had almost no tendencies in total points betting. Astonishingly, considering their defence, Titans totals over 51 points halved last year to two.

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$34.00

Minor Premiership: \$41.00

Top 4: \$8.00

Top 8: \$3.00

The Bookmaker: "Offseason signings probably the best of any club but there still needs to be some explanation for last year's wooden spoon debacle. Was it the coach's fault or the playing roster? Where does the blame lie? No excuses in 2012."

-Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

Mr Rugby Assessment: It's been a busy offseason on the Gold Coast but I'm not sure the new signings are the type of players who will give John Cartwright the reliability he craves. The Titans came last in 2011 and I don't expect much in the way of improvement. Price: \$51.00

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 54.5 (8th)

Weighted Roster Rating: 67.4 (8th)

Predicted Finishing Range: 5th-12th

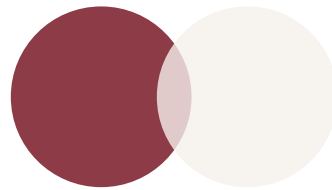
Predicted Finish: 8th

Last season I went against the wave of popular opinion by declaring the Titans were still a premiership contender and nearly drowned as that wave swept me and the Gold Coast into the abyss. It was a miserable season, one full of disappointment. It ended with the wooden spoon and the worst attack and defence record in the NRL. As they say, the only way is up. And it should be a fairly quick rise for the Titans, who have recruited astutely and still have a quality coach and a halfback that is capable of rediscovering his form of 2010 now fit and healthy. It would seem hard to believe that a forward pack that will start four Origin players, the most durable player in the code and a promising young hooker will get beaten as often as they did last year and the backline certainly doesn't lack the class or will that it did last year. If any club can disregard its numbers from last year, it is the Titans who have signed four new starters and get back all their injured stars. The way it is shaping for the Titans, they will be fiercer in defence while their attack, going on their purchases, should be more dynamic and unpredictable. This is John Cartwright's Frost year. The fork in the road is upon him and the true test of his mettle will be found in 2012. He has the tools now at his disposal to mould a finals contender. But if he relies on old ideas, continues to try and be buddy-buddy with the players and sits back when it comes to off-field concerns, 2012 will be highly disappointing. Against popular opinion again, I expect the Titans to be back in the finals in 2012.

2012 Betting Advice: Despite such a disappointing 2011 season, the Titans shape as big overs in most markets this year. There were plenty of excuses for their abysmal performance last year: injuries (particularly to key players), poor

outside backs, terrible handling, an aging squad. But a big recruitment drive and the bleeding of younger players has the Titans looking very strong with the team having six blue chip players. A big turnaround is forecast with another horrible season not expected. At huge odds in premierships and minor premierships betting (\$34 and \$41 at Flemington Sportsbet respectively) they can be speculated on. More enticing, however, is the \$3 to make the eight and \$8 to make the four. With the exception of concerns at fullback and five-eighth, the Titans have class across the paddock and a decent amount of depth. They can easily return to premierships contention, particularly if Scott Prince finds form. With four home games in their first six, they should be bet pre-season if they are going to be tried. Winger David Mead scored 16 tries in a breakout season on a poor team and can threaten the top try scorer market in an improved side. Keep an eye out for him.

MANLY SEA EAGLES



Strongest Team

1. Brett Stewart (fb)
2. David Williams (w)
3. Jamie Lyon (c/fe)
4. Steve Matai (c)
5. Michael Oldfield (w)
6. Kieran Foran (fe/hb)
7. Daly Cherry-Evans (hb)
13. Glenn Stewart (br)
12. Tony Williams (br/w)
11. Anthony Watmough (br)
10. Jason King (p)
9. Matt Ballin (h)
8. Brent Kite (p)

-
14. Jamie Buhner (br/h)
 15. George Rose (p)
 16. Vic Mauro (br/p)
 17. Joe Galuvao (p/br)

Others: Dean Whare (c), Ben Farrar (w/c/fb), Daniel Harrison (br), Liam Foran (hb/fe), Tim Robinson (p), Darcy Lussick (p), James Cunningham (p), Junior Palau (p/br), Nick Skinner (p/br), Jorge Taufua (c)

Gains: Ben Farrar (Catalans)

Losses: Will Hopoate (Mormon mission/Parramatta), Shane Rodney (Harlequins), Michael Robertson (Harlequins)

Net Recruitment Assessment: Manly have again gone backwards in the recruitment stakes, losing star winger William Hopoate to a Mormon mission and then Parramatta. Hopoate has superstardom written all over him and his loss is a huge blow for the premiers. The Eagles have also lost reliable winger Michael Robertson though luckily the club has great depth in the outside backs with Ben Farrar returning as a straight-up swap for Robertson. Shane Rodney's move to Harlequins has garnered little attention but he has been a very good player for Manly and one they will certainly miss. With Des Hasler and most of the Manly staff moving to Canterbury, speculation will be rife that any number of loyal servants could be leaving including Kieran Foran, Daly Cherry-Evans, Jamie Lyon and the Stewart boys.

Representative Losses: (Likely) Anthony Watmough. (Possible) Jason King, Glenn Stewart, Brett Stewart, Steve Matai, Kieran Foran, Brent Kite.

Position Ratings:

Fullback ----- 9

Perhaps the biggest compliment that can be paid to Manly fullback Brett Stewart is the fact the last three seasons he has spent most of the year on the park, Manly have made the Grand Final. In the two years that were ruined by serious knee injuries, Manly fell away in the first week of the finals. Stewart is a rare attacking genius with an elite ability to find the tryline. He is also ultra-reliable in defence. He will be better this year than last and should be battling Josh Dugan for the NSW No.1 jersey:-

Three Quarters ----- 7

Centre Jamie Lyon again played at an elite level in 2011 as both a scorer and distributor, scoring eight tries and setting up 14. Even at 30, his game is not expected to decline anytime soon. He will be partnered by Steve Matai, the fiery centre who had one of his strongest seasons in 2011. His discipline and handling improved and he offered more in attack with his usually strong defence again excellent. Both starting wingers have left Manly though. Will Hopoate was such an exceptional talent that he was called up to play for NSW last year but is off on a Mormon mission while the ever-reliable Michael Robertson, who scored 68 tries in 150 games for the Sea Eagles, has gone overseas. Former international David Williams shaped as a natural replacement but has played only 12 games in the last two seasons as he has battled an array of injuries and is currently fighting a serious neck injury that will keep him out of most of the preseason and likely the start of the 2012 campaign. Michael Oldfield has proven a very good backup the last two seasons, playing 15 matches, and should prove a capable wing option. Youngster Dean Whare and the returning Ben Farrar, both fair, will battle for the other wing spot should Williams not come up.

Five-Eighth ----- 8.5

Kieran Foran went from nice second-option to top-level playmaker in 2011, one of the key elements of Manly's premiership and ranking No.9 in MTN's annual top 50 list. At one stage Foran led the Dally M Medal count, such was his form over the first two-thirds of the season. Always a good ball runner, his passing and kicking games improved immensely in 2011 to make Foran one of the most dangerous halves in the game. Incredibly valuable to Manly.

Halfback ----- 8.5

What an astonishing debut season for Daly Cherry-Evans, playing a key hand in guiding Manly to the premiership and winning an Australian jersey. After taking a few months to warm to the job, Cherry-Evans showed tremendous poise and maturity, ranked No.14 in the MTN Top 50 and was unlucky not to win the Churchill Medal last year. There are a couple of concerns – second-year syndrome and playing without Des Hasler – but Cherry-Evans looks a real gem.

Hooker ----- 7.5

There is no questioning Matt Ballin's defensive capabilities. Now playing 80 minutes, Ballin regularly tops Manly's tackle count while giving away little when the big boppers run at him. Such is the respect he has earned; he was called up to replace Cameron Smith in the Queensland Origin team in 2010. He is almost a non-factor in attack though. Ballin scored only one try, set up just four, ran for just over 30 metres a game and recorded a total of just one offload and 11 tackle breaks in 24 games. Surrounded by talented playmakers, his flaccid attacking prowess is not a major issue at Manly but it is something that will limit him and the club in future if he doesn't endeavour to offer more with the ball in hand.

Prop ----- 6.5

The Manly prop rotation is the weak-link of the team despite Jason King being an Origin incumbent and Brent Kite being a former international with 14 Tests to his name. Both put up only fair numbers, both are lumbering and slow and both add very little to the Eagles. Joe Galuvao puts up the same kind of numbers and would be on about 25% of the coin the starting duo are on. George Rose is fun to watch but his production is not good enough for a regular first grade prop.

Backrow ----- 8.5

It was hard not to be impressed by Manly's backrow in 2011. Glenn Stewart was outstanding, very nearly pinching the Dally M Medal. Tough, skilful, dedicated, Stewart is the complete footballer who lifted with the return of his brother. A top class lock. Anthony Watmough also returned to form last year on the back of a focus on greater discipline. Watmough missed fewer tackles, gave away fewer penalties and made fewer handling errors. His tackling is still a worry and he has a low football IQ but he is such a tough runner that he is always a danger. Tony Williams' move to the second row was such a winner that he won an Australian jersey by season's end. He won't ever be a tackling machine but he is a big hitter and fantastic runner. Jamie Buhner just loves to tackle and is an underrated backup with a nice future.

Blue Chip Players: 5- Brett Stewart (fullback), Jamie Lyon (centre), Kieran Foran (five-eighth), Daly Cherry-Evans (halfback), Glenn Stewart (backrow)

Coach Rating: Geoff Toovey (1st season at Manly, 1st in the NRL) ----- 4

Coach History:

W-L Record: 0-0
Finals Record: 0-0
Finals Seasons: 0
Premierships: 0
Club Record: 0-0

Coach Analysis: Geoff Toovey will enter his first season as a top grade coach after being the rushed replacement for Des Hasler, first appointed for 2013 and then immediately after Hasler was axed. There is very little to gauge Toovey on. He was appointed without a proper interview process after being Hasler's assistant since 2004, having spent his entire 286-game, 14-season playing career at Brookvale. He is Manly through and through and the Eagles have had success with such appointments in the past but there are some significant question marks over Toovey's lack of experience outside the Manly system. The former champion halfback may turn out to be a very nice coach but you wouldn't lay your hard earned on it at this stage. Highly rated New South Wales assistant Matt Parish and successful Toyota Cup team coach David Penna will assist Toovey.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	18-6	2nd	5-3	7-1	6-2	3-0	Premiers	
2010	12-12	8th	5-3	3-5	4-4	0-1	Qualifying Final	
2009	14-10	5th	2-6	6-2	6-2	0-1	Qualifying Final	
2008	17-7	2nd	5-3	7-1	5-3	3-0	Premiers	
2007	18-6	2nd	7-1	5-3	6-2	2-1	Grand Final	

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
--Debut Season--								

Draw Analysis: Over the last five seasons, Manly have tended to play consistent rugby league throughout the season. They have only had one start to the season below 5-3 (in 2009, while suffering a premiership hangover) and they have come home at least 4-4 in each of those seasons. It will be on new coach Geoff Toovey to maintain such consistent football in the wake of last year's title. The defending premiers open the season in a Grand Final rematch against the Warriors in Auckland and will be away from Brookvale in four of their first five. In those first five games, the Sea Eagles have two five-day backups. Manly take their byes in rounds 14 and 17 meaning they will host the Roosters without their Origin stars in round 11, probably a net win for Manly who could realistically have only Glenn Stewart on duty. The run home for Manly is fair with four home games and four matches against 2011 finalists. If the Sea Eagles can collect some points in the first five rounds then they should be playing finals again for an eighth straight season.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	21-6	14-1	7-5
2010	12-13	7-5	5-8
2009	14-11	8-4	6-7
2008	20-7	10-3	10-4
2007	20-7	12-1	8-6
Five-Year Total	87-44	51-14	36-30

Home and Away Analysis: Manly have one of the strongest home ground advantages in the NRL, winning 78.5% of home matches and 75.9% at Brookvale Oval. Manly also did not lose in Sydney last year, going 18-0 in the Harbour City. The Sea Eagles have been only slightly above average on the road, going 54.5% away from home but only finishing two games above .500 in two of their three Grand Final seasons, but travelling has never been a problem with their worst road record over that period being 5-8 in 2010.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	1st	7th	6th	1st	2nd
Metres	2nd	10th	9th	1st	3rd
Offloads	10th	15th	11th	5th	3rd
Tackle Breaks	13th	9th	8th	2nd	1st
Errors	4th	2nd	5th	4th	7th

Defence Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	2nd	10th	6th	2nd	2nd
Metres Conceded	1st	9th	6th	1st	3rd
Missed Tackles	2nd	5th	9th	7th	5th

Attack-Defence Ranking Analysis: When Manly made back-to-back Grand Finals in 2007 and 2008, the Eagles were a top-two team in both attack and defence. They slipped a little in 2009 and fell even further in 2010 but last year returned to being a top-two team on both sides of the ball. Manly showed no weakness in defence last year, ranking first in metres conceded and second in points conceded and missed tackles. The “Moneyball” approach employed under Des Hasler ensured weaknesses were identified and fixed. Manly were again highly disciplined in attack – a hallmark of the Hasler way – ranking fourth in handling errors. Tackle

breaks were down but that was more than offset by a significant bump in metres gained. Manly were the most reliant team on statistics in the NRL under Hasler but with most of his staff now at Canterbury it remains to be seen how the club will operate under Geoff Toovey. The smart money is on a more old school, less successful approach.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	Brett Stewart	15
2010	Tony Williams	16
2009	David Williams	11
2008	Brett Stewart	22
2007	Brett Stewart	19

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 58 (7th) 2011 Key Position: 8 (3rd)
 2010: 70 (12th)

Games Lost Analysis: A key to Manly's success in 2011 was the continuity the club maintained in its spine. Daly Cherry-Evans and Matt Ballin each played all 27 games while Kieran Foran missed just one game. A problematic hamstring kept Brett Stewart out of seven games but it was the healthiest he has been in three years. A pectoral injury kept skipper and Origin prop Jason King to just 16 games while boom young outside back Will Hopoate missed eight games after a hamstring tear and a fractured knee. There is no question Manly's reliance on sports science has been behind their good health.

2011 Betting Analysis: Premiers Manly turned their betting form around in 2011, going 16-11 ATS, recording the third largest profit for those bettors who invested \$1 on Manly in every match, with the Eagles returning \$3.92. Such was their perceived dominance at home, Manly's average home price was \$1.39, equal shortest in the NRL. It reaped plenty of rewards for punters with Manly covering the spread in 11 of 15 when not travelling. They are now 16-12 ATS at home in their last two seasons but 2010 was out of line with traditional Manly showings. The Sea Eagles were strong bets as favourites, going 14-8 ATS when giving points. One tendency Manly have shown is a struggle when an away underdog, going 4-7 ATS when getting points on the road. The Eagles went 9-4 ATS when given more than six points start and were a perfect 6-0 ATS in wet weather. As a total points proposition, Manly were a 15-12 under team, going 4-1 under when an outsider. The move to an under team was based on a marked improvement in their defence with Manly matches totalling 41 or more 11 times in 2011, down from 17 times in 2010.

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$10.00

Minor Premiership: \$9.00

Top 4: \$3.00

Top 8: \$1.57

The Bookmaker: "I've been a loyal Manly fan since the days we travelled from the coalfields in Cessnock to Manly beach for school holidays but I am appalled at the way the club has gone since winning the premiership. Those at the club should hang their heads in shame. Following the embarrassing implosion, I tore up my club membership. The big question now is, with Geoff Toovey in the stands, who is going to run the water sponge and the call the shots from behind the play 95% of the game as Toovs has been doing for years. If the Manly club were in charge of the ferries, they'd be sure to sink to the bottom of Sydney Harbour. No thanks."

-Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

Mr Rugby Assessment: Most judges would feel I have gone too far with this price but I am adamant in my numbers. A fish rots from the head down and Manly will not succeed with a split board, rookie coach, the pressure of going back-to-back, a weakened squad and a taxing trip to Leeds. 'Nuff said. Price: \$21.00

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 59.5 (4th)

Weighted Roster Rating: 73.9 (4th)

Predicted Finishing Range: 3rd-9th

Predicted Finish: 5th

Des Hasler did not raise Manly from the dead last year but he took them from life support all the way to an unexpected premiership in one of the great coaching efforts. Hasler is gone now though, as is nearly all his staff, fleeing to Canterbury for money and the sanity of a stable board. His decision to leave Brookvale and take with him most of his staff is perhaps the biggest offseason loss. He was as integral to their success as any coach has been to a premiership side and while Geoff Toovey may prove a success, he has huge shoes to fill. Toovey does inherit a quality side that includes the most skilled centre in the game in Jamie Lyon, a brilliant halves combination in Kieran Foran and Daly Cherry-Evans and an underrated superstar at fullback in Brett Stewart. Losing Will Hopoate and Shane Rodney will hurt though, as will the prospect of a premiership hangover that hurt Manly early 2009. That said, Manly should be about the mark again. Their roster rates too strongly, they possess such a dominant home field advantage and the culture at the club is one of success. But queries over the new coach and the likelihood of boardroom conflict and off-field distractions being ever-present, it is hard to see Manly going back-to-back. Manly will strong again in 2012 - just not as strong as they were in 2011.

2012 Betting Advice: The two futures bets that are enticing for Manly are the Eagles to finish in the eight and the four. For all the upheaval at the club, Manly have a top class spine and a big home field advantage and with a favourable draw, it is hard to see them missing out unless a big injury toll hits. The \$1.57 available is short but is a touch of overs on the \$1.52 they rate. I can't quite come into the \$3.00 on the four but they are worthy of watching and a possible speculation. Offseason trouble, a poor recruitment outcome and an untried coach worry me enough to not get involved at the short odds on Manly winning the premiership or minor premiership. The Eagles were outstanding at home last year and with question marks over their strength in 2012, they are likely to offer value at Brookvale again. Manly perform strongly as underdogs and can be tried in such a situation with confidence in 2012.

MELBOURNE STORM



Strongest Team

1. Billy Slater (fb)
2. Anthony Quinn (w)
3. Justin O'Neill (c/w)
4. Dane Nielsen (c/w)
5. Matt Duffie (w)
6. Gareth Widdop (fe/fb/c/w)
7. Cooper Cronk (hb)
13. Ryan Hinchcliffe (br/h)
12. Sika Manu (br/p)
11. Ryan Hoffman (br)
10. Jason Ryles (p)
9. Cameron Smith (h)
8. Jesse Bromwich (p)

-
14. Bryan Norrie (p)
 15. Kevin Proctor (br/p)
 16. Michael Greenfield (p)
 17. Todd Lowrie (br)

Others: Siosaia Vave (br/p), Luke Kelly (hb/fe), Rory Kostjasyn (h/fe), Maurice Blair (c/fe), Jaiman Lowe (p), Mitchell Johnson (p), Shea Moylan (w), Sisi Waqa (w), Kenneath Bromwich (p/br), Mahe Fonua (c), Will Chambers (c)

Gains: Ryan Hoffman (Wigan), Jason Ryles (Sydney Roosters), Michael Greenfield (St George-Illawarra), Siosaia Vave (Cronulla), Shea Moylan (Brisbane), Will Chambers (Rugby union)

Losses: Adam Blair (Wests Tigers), Beau Champion (Gold Coast), Chase Stanley (St George-Illawarra), Adam Woolnough (Retired), Troy Thompson (Retired), Atelea Vea (St George-Illawarra), Robbie Rochow (Newcastle), Dane Chisholm (Wests Tigers), Sione Kite (Released), Elijah Niko (North Queensland)

Net Recruitment Assessment: Craig Bellamy's history of turning average/mediocre players into contributors and extending the careers of many aging players considered to be on the wane means that it is never wise to question the Storm's recruitment. With salary cap pressures still impacting, the Storm have followed a similar path to last season, losing a number of big-money players and recruiting old and discarded players. Bellamy will attempt to revive the career of props Jason Ryles and Michael Greenfield, a challenge on both fronts, while he will slip former protégé Ryan Hoffman straight back into the starting line-up. Will Chambers returns from rugby union and will battle for a centre position. Those purchases do not cover for

the loss of excitable forward Adam Blair and quality outside backs Beau Champion and Chase Stanley, even if Champion and Stanley were both injury-prone last season. The Storm seem to be covered in the three-quarter line but it is aggression in the pack that is the big worry with the Storm finding nobody to replace Blair's feistiness. On paper, the Storm have lost out in the recruitment stakes. But we all know how Craig Bellamy can get the most out of some fairly ordinary players.

Representative Losses: (Likely) Billy Slater, Cameron Smith, Cooper Cronk, Gareth Widdop. (Possible) Matt Duffie, Dane Nielsen, Kevin Proctor, Ryan Hinchcliffe.

Position Ratings:

Fullback ----- 10

Slater is unquestionably the best fullback in the game - and has been for at least five years - and is arguably the greatest cusrodian the game has ever known. He is certainly in the argument with Churchill and Langlands. The reigning Dally M Player of the Year and Golden Boot winner is arguably the best player in the world, clearly having lost none of his ability. He is a star in every facet of the game, a legitimate game-winner whose defence is as sound as his attack.

Three Quarters ----- 6.5

The Storm enter the 2012 season with the least fearsome backline they have possessed in over a decade. Despite having Kiwi international Matt Duffie and Queensland centre Dane Nielsen, the Storm three-quarter line does not look overly penetrating. Duffie is a good finisher and adequate returner but nothing more. Nielsen is a defence-oriented centre with little pace who has scored only 17 tries in 57 games. He will likely be partnered in the centres by Justin O'Neill, who did not develop as expected last year. Maurice Blair is another centre option, as is the returning Will Chambers, who should be fresh after a two-year holiday in rugby union. Anthony Quinn has plenty of experience but lacks pace and injuries have meant he has only managed 33 games over the last three seasons. Sisi Waqa and Shea Moylan may take Quinn's spot if more speed is required, which it likely will be.

Five-Eighth ----- 5

Gareth Widdop could not have been more impressive in his first full season, making the most of his opportunity to play regular first grade. Despite playing out of position, he formed a wonderful partnership with halfback Cooper Cronk. A strong runner with a devastating step, Widdop also excelled as a playmaker, laying on 15 tries. With another preseason under his belt and more confidence in the five-eighth position, Widdop should reach even greater heights in 2012.

Halfback ----- 9.5

Last year I wrote of Cronk: "Arguably the most important player at the Melbourne Storm, Cooper Cronk ranks as an elite player in all important categories for a halfback. He has a top class kicking game. He has a sensational pass. He can run. He

can tackle. He can lead his team around the park." Nothing has changed. He is one of the best players in the game who almost never turns in a poor performance. The forgotten superstar.

Hooker ----- 10

There isn't much that needs to be said here outside of the fact Cameron Smith is the best player in the world. The new Queensland and Australian skipper does everything at an exceptional level. He is one of the hardest workers in the game defensively, he is a wonderfully gifted playmaker, an inspirational leader, a top-notch goalkicker and a sharp runner from dummy half. Smith won the Wally Lewis Medal, the Dally M Hooker of the Year, the Dally M Captain of the Year and the Melbourne Storm Player of the Year in 2011 showing that at 28, he is at the peak of his powers.

Prop ----- 5

The reason the Storm were not playing in last year's Grand Final after claiming the minor premiership was a lack of firepower up front. One of the sacrifices the Storm have made is at prop, deciding to spend only the minimum on honest but unwanted types. Last year, the Storm had Adam Blair but once he was suspended opposition packs manhandled the Storm and that is how the Warriors got them in the prelim. Blair is gone now, replaced by 33-year-old Jason Ryles. I know Craig Bellamy is a genius and he does get the most out of his players but he is going to have to be Houdini to get something out of the ex-Roosters pickle who thrives on giving away dumb penalties. Michael Greenfield is the other front row recruit. He has played only 37 games since debuting in 2004 and did not improve under Wayne Bennett. Jesse Bromwich looks like he is the man to lead the pack. He came on nicely in 2011, averaging 22 and 100, and showed some real toughness. Bryan Norrie and Jaiman Lowe are old hard-heads but are only up-and-down types. Young type Mitchell Johnson should get a chance.

Backrow ----- 6

Ryan Hoffman returns to the Storm this year and joins a fairly limited backrow. Hoffman tended to be an overrated proposition when he was at the club and is more a poor man's Ben Creagh than anything else. Ryan Hinchcliffe was touted as an Origin prospect last season. While he works hard defensively, he is small-bodied and has little use in attack. Sika Manu and Kevin Proctor are the two backrowers with upside. Manu is a devastating runner with thighs the size of tree trunks and is a real x-factor when on the park but injuries have been a significant issue for him, having played only one full season injury-free. Proctor plays a similar style though a little more defence-focussed. He wins the ruck more often than not and has experience at international level. Todd Lowrie has been a bitter disappointment since joining from Parramatta after being touted as a replacement for Dallas Johnson. He is a cheap Ryan Hinchcliffe impersonator.

Blue Chip Players: 4- Billy Slater (fullback), Gareth Widdop (five-eighth), Cooper Cronk (halfback), Cameron Smith (hooker)

Coach Rating: Craig Bellamy (9th season at Melbourne, 9th in the NRL) ----- **9.5**

Coach History:

W-L Record: 160-76-1

Finals Record: 15-6

Finals Seasons: 8

Premierships: 2

Club Record: 160-76-1

Coach Analysis: There is no better coach in rugby league at present and that includes the game's greatest of all-time, Wayne Bennett. In every facet of coaching, Bellamy excels. After taking the Storm to two premierships, three straight minor premierships and four consecutive Grand Finals between 2006 and 2009, Bellamy has risen another level over the last two seasons. In one of the most remarkable coaching efforts in any sport in any season, Bellamy led the Storm to a 14-10 record in a season where the club was playing for no premiership points after round seven. He followed that up with another minor premiership last season after losing six representative players in a performance that won Coach of the Year honours. Bellamy has provided the Storm's identity – conservative attack, stoic and innovative defence and an adherence to the fundamentals of the game – which has proven to be the benchmark in the league. His Storm teams are always fit, always well-drilled, always high in football intelligence and always well prepared. Bellamy is one of the great motivators, he is an outstanding tactician and he is a fine developer of talent. Bellamy also manages to nearly always get the best out of all his players, seen in young defectors suffering from reversals when leaving the club and older types enjoying Indian summers when joining the Storm. Bellamy is one of the all-time greats at the peak of his powers.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	19-5	1st	6-2	7-1	6-2	1-1	Preliminary Final	
2010	14-10	16th	6-2	3-5	5-3	DNQ	--	
2009	14-9-1	4th	4-3-1	6-2	4-4	3-0	Premiers	
2008	17-7	1st	6-2	5-3	6-2	2-2	Grand Final	
2007	21-3	1st	7-1	7-1	7-1	4-0	Premiers	

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason Finish
2011	19-5	1st	6-2	7-1	6-2	1-1	Preliminary Final
2010	14-10	16th	6-2	3-5	5-3	DNQ	--
2009	14-9-1	4th	4-3-1	6-2	4-4	3-0	Premiers
2008	17-7	1st	6-2	5-3	6-2	2-2	Grand Final
2007	21-3	1st	7-1	7-1	7-1	4-0	Premiers

Draw Analysis: As the most dominant team in the NRL over the last six years, Melbourne have shown a tendency to be strong from beginning to end. The only time the Storm failed to win at least four games in one of the divides over the last six years was right after the Salary Cap scandal in 2010. The Storm have no real tendencies, usually starting well and then building on that lead with more winning. You don't win two premierships and four minor premierships and make four Grand Finals in six years by having down periods. The Storm should again start well with one of the easier starts to the season, playing five home games in their first eight and not playing a finalist from 2011 until Newcastle in round five. They don't meet a team who advanced past the first week of the finals last year until tackling the Warriors at home in round eight. With Penrith and Cronulla in the following two rounds, the Storm go into their first bye in round 11 with a very good chance of leading the premiership. With the Storm's second bye in round 17, they will play only the Tigers without their Origin stars, where the Storm will be net losers in Origin dropouts. The Tigers match comes in a tough run for the Storm between their byes, where they tackle the other three preliminary finalists from last season, along with the Tigers and Bulldogs. If the Storm do find trouble in 2012, this will be the period. Craig Bellamy's team have a fair run in with four home games and four games against 2011 finalists. Melbourne have received one of the more favourable draws, one which should allow them to start well and finish strongly after a tough few weeks throughout Origin.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	20-6	11-3	9-3
2010	14-10	9-3	5-7
2009	17-9-1	11-2-1	6-7
2008	19-9	11-2	8-7
2007	25-3	14-0	11-3
Five-Year Total	95-37-1	56-10-1	39-27

Home and Away Analysis: Melbourne is the hardest place in rugby league to go in and win with the Storm accumulating an incredible 56-10-1 record at home over the last five seasons. The Storm went 11-3 at AAMI Park in 2011 and even with nothing to play for in 2010, the Storm still went 9-3 in the Southern City. Whether it is AAMI Stadium, Olympic Park or the Docklands, the Storm simply do not lose at home. Craig Bellamy's team also have an imposing record on the road, winning 39 of 66 outside of Victoria, the strongest away record of all interstate teams.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	4th	13th	5th	4th	1st
Metres	11th	16th	7th	4th	1st
Offloads	13th	8th	15th	16th	16th
Tackle Breaks	10th	14th	1st	7th	3rd
Errors	2nd	16th	3rd	2nd	5th

Defence Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	1st	2nd	1st	1st	1st
Metres Conceded	6th	4th	8th	6th	1st
Missed Tackles	1st	2nd	1st	1st	2nd

Attack-Defence Ranking Analysis: The success of Melbourne over the last five seasons has been based on their impregnable defence. Melbourne have ranked top-two in points allowed (the best indicator of a strong team) over the last six seasons and top-two in missed tackles. The Storm players are well drilled in defence and know that to keep a first grade position they need to make tackles and adhere to Bellamy's patterns. 'Don't let them score' is the mantra the entire Storm organisation believes wholeheartedly in. The Storm's attacking identity returned after the scandal-plagued 2010 where Melbourne tossed it about and had some fun. Handling was again top class while the Storm were a top-four scoring team. The only noticeable downswing was in attacking penetration with a 10th-placed tackle break ranking and an 11th-placed metres gained classification. The Storm were less dynamic with the ball last year and it told at the backend of the season when they struggled to break down strong defences.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	Billy Slater, Cooper Cronk, Matt Duffie	12
2010	Greg Inglis	11
2009	Billy Slater	18
2008	Greg Inglis	17
2007	Israel Folau	21

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 59 (8th) 2011 Key Position: 8 (3rd)
2010: 80 (14th)

Games Lost Analysis: Once again the Storm's big three remained healthy with Billy Slater, Cameron Smith and Cooper Cronk only missing games seven games, primarily due to Origin. With new No.6 Gareth Widdop absent for only a game, the Storm were sweet in the key positions again. The worst injury suffered by the Storm was to centre Chase Stanley, who again went down early, playing only one game before rupturing his ACL. Sika Manu, Matt Duffie and Anthony Quinn all missed over a month at various points of the year.

2011 Betting Analysis: Melbourne were a top class betting proposition in 2011, going 15-11 ATS. The Storm were 8-6 ATS at home, taking them to 16-10 against the line in Melbourne over the last two years. The Storm were again magnificent as favourites, going 14-10 ATS. They are 26-17 ATS when in the chalk over the last two seasons and 16-9 ATS when a home favourite. The Storm are particularly backable when favoured by less than six, going 9-2 ATS last year and 16-5 ATS over the last two. In day matches, the Storm were 6-2 ATS, while Melbourne were 5-0 ATS off Monday night football, now 7-0 ATS in a short week over the last two years. In head-to-head betting, the Storm were the most profitable team, making \$6.07 for those who put \$1 on them in every match. They had the shortest average price in the NRL at \$1.47 with the equal shortest home price of \$1.39 and the shortest road price of \$1.57. The under was once again a fantastic bet in Melbourne games, going 17-9 under last year. Over the last two seasons, Storm games are 35-15 under. The under was particularly strong at home with Melbourne going 11-3 under at AAMI Park. Another good situation for the Storm is when they are a road underdog: the under is 6-0 over the last two years when given points on the road. Day games have also tended to go under with Melbourne 8-0 under in the afternoon last year and 13-2 under over the last two years. In good weather over the last two years, Melbourne are 31-12 under, the strongest weather trend in the NRL. The Storm had only seven matches total 41 or more last year, marginally up from five in 2010.

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$9.50

Minor Premiership: \$7.00

Top 4: \$2.35

Top 8: \$1.45

The Bookmaker: "Craig Bellamy is a genius coach who consistently seems to get the Storm through injury free but he has his work cut out for him with Jason Ryles. Good luck there, Mr Bellamy. Ryan Hoffman back is a big plus."

-Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

Mr Rugby Assessment: I feel this will be the year Melbourne drop out of the top echelon of sides. Craig Bellamy may find there is no juice left in the lemon, which looked to be the case towards the end of 2011. The lack of depth can only be hidden for so long and I suspect Smith, Slater and Cronk won't get the support they need. Price: \$17.00

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 64.5 (1st)

Weighted Roster Rating: 83.5 (1st)

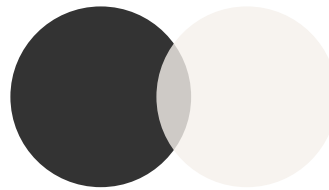
Predicted Finishing Range: 1st-6th

Predicted Finish: 1st

The timing was just a little off in 2011. Driven by the burning desire to avenge the 2010 salary cap scandal, the Storm flew out of the blocks and led the competition from round 15 on to win the minor premiership. But the Storm started to stumble late in the season and after Cooper Cronk got hurt and Adam Blair suspended, Craig Bellamy just couldn't get the Storm firing on all cylinders again, the minor premiers eventually going down to New Zealand in the preliminary final. That match was telling as it exposed the Storm's great weakness: an ineffective and staid forward pack who can get manhandled by bigger, more dynamic forwards. This is again the Storm's big weakness, heightened by the loss of Adam Blair. There is no doubt the Storm once again boast outstanding credentials. They have a super coach, arguably the best spine in rugby league history, the strongest home ground advantage in the league and a most favourable draw that will have them on top of the ladder by the representative bye. Craig Bellamy will get the most out of his bit-part players and there will be no better prepared or fitter team in the NRL. There is no question that Melbourne will again be around the mark. They rate as the top team and they are going to be very hard to beat in the minor premiership. No other team plays as consistently well as the Storm and there is no reason that will change this year. But they have a huge vulnerability that can be exploited at the business end of the season and that hangs like an albatross around their neck. If they get the right match-ups come September, they should go the distance. But if they again find themselves against the Warriors, a Brisbane or a Manly, then a disappointing September elimination would seem likely.

2012 Betting Advice: Melbourne present a number of outstanding betting opportunities this season. In futures betting, the most enticing are the Storm for the minor premiership and the top four with \$7.00 (Flemington Sportsbet) and \$2.45 (Flemington Sportsbet) available. The \$9.00 about the title is backable but the minor premiership wager is better value as their greatest strength is their consistency. The \$2.45 is tight for top four wagering but it is only injuries to key players that will keep them out. Those wanting to invest in Storm futures should do so immediately as they have the easiest run in the first eight weeks. As a team with a distinctive style and very real tendencies, plenty of week-to-week opportunities exist. The Storm are great as favourites, particularly home favourites and especially when favoured by less than a converted try, and that is unlikely to change this year. The Storm are clinical and get the job done. Day matches and off Monday night football have also been positive betting situations for the Storm in recent seasons. The great Storm play though is the under, in which they are 35-15 over the last two years. Day games, where the line is usually bumped up, have been an under play for punters with the Storm involved while there is no stronger weather trend than the Storm going 31-12 under in good weather. Punters should look to bet Melbourne and the under as often as they can in 2012.

NEW ZEALAND WARRIORS



Strongest Team

1. Kevin Locke (fb/w)
2. Bill Tupou (w)
3. Jerome Ropati (c/fe)
4. Lewis Brown (br/c)
5. Manu Vatuvei (w)
6. James Maloney (hb/fe)
7. Shaun Johnson (hb/fe)
13. Micheal Luck (br)
12. Simon Mannering (br)
11. Feleti Mateo (br/fe)
10. Sam Rapira (p)
9. Nathan Friend (h)
8. Russell Packer (p)

-
14. Elijah Taylor (br/fe/c)
 15. Ben Matulino (br/p)
 16. Jacob Lillyman (p/br)
 17. Pita Godinet (hb/h)

Others: Krisnan Inu (c/w), Ukuma Ta'ai (p/br), Sione Lousi (br), Sam Lousi (br/p), Alehana Mara (h), Upu Poching (p), Glen Fiisiahi (w/fb/c), Steve Rapira (br/p), Ben Henry (br), Konrad Hurrell (c/w), Sebastine Ikahihifo (br), Ivan Penehe (w/c), Sio Siua Taukeiaho (w/br), Carlos Tuimavave (fe/fb), Omar Slaimankhel (fb/w)

Gains: Nathan Friend (Gold Coast)

Losses: Lance Hohaia (St Helens), Brett Seymour (Hull), Jeremy Latimore (St George-Illawarra), Shaun Berrigan (Canberra), Aaron Heremaia (Hull), Joel Moon (Salford), Adam Henry (Sydney Roosters), James Gavet (Canterbury), Isaac John (Wakefield)

Net Recruitment Assessment: The Warriors have made only one purchase over the offseason but it is a notable one with quality hooker Nathan Friend joining from the Titans after an injury ravaged season. New Zealand have lacked a skilled rake for most of the club's existence but now have an 80-minute player who has a huge appetite for work and is creative out of dummy half. Friend adds starch to the sometimes-fragile Warriors middle while making the Warriors' spine one of the most potent in the NRL. Seven players who had a run in the top grade in 2011 have been moved on but few will be missed as the new generation of Warriors stars sweeps into first grade.

Representative Losses: (Likely) Manu Vatuvei, Kevin Locke, Lewis Brown, Ben Matulino Simon Mannering, Sam Rapira, Thomas Leuluai. (Possible) Russell Packer, Shaun Johnson.

Position Ratings:

Fullback ----- 7.5

Ivan Cleary bit the bullet last year and shifted Kevin Locke from the wing to fullback and it reaped significant rewards with Locke playing a key hand in the Warriors' Grand Final run. Locke's game is similar to that of Slater, a rolling ball of energy with outstanding quickness, an innate ability to score tries and a keenness to make plays in the line. Will be better for the experience of last year and has the upside to become one of the game's best fullbacks. Lacks nothing in courage either.

Three Quarters ----- 7

Manu Vatuvei enters this season off his quietest year, one where he scored 12 tries in 19 games, his sixth straight season with double-figure tries. Errors were a problem, however, with The Beast making 27 mistakes including five in the qualifying final loss to Brisbane. As a result his confidence took a battering. At his best he is a legitimate match-winner and he will be required to stay both healthy and involved if the Warriors are to again threaten because the Warriors are short in the three-quarter line. Bill Tupou showed a few signs of life last year and will likely start on the right wing. The centre position is a noteworthy worry. Jerome Ropati is a quality player and will take one spot but he is injury prone and missed the majority of last season after needing a knee reconstruction. Lewis Brown is a tough, hard-nosed player and a quality backrower but he can be found out of position in the centres and his lack of speed and his defensive reads are negatives. Liability Krisnan Inu and the promising Glen Fiisiahi will fight for first grade positions. Surely Inu has had enough chances and won't be used.

Five-Eighth ----- 7

A breakout performer in 2011, James Maloney has capitalised by signing a big money deal with the Sydney Roosters for 2013. That puts him in an awkward position for 2012 with word from the Warriors camp having senior players unimpressed with his attitude. The Warriors will need Maloney to fire. His kicking game is among the best in the NRL and was critical to the Warriors' success last year while his goal kicking is always sound. Turned into a dangerous runner as well. Could be a contender for the New South Wales No.6 if he follows through on his 2011 form.

Halfback ----- 5

Shaun Johnson didn't make his debut until round 13 but in only 16 games he set the competition alight, compared to Benji Marshall in style and scoring the best individual try of the year. Johnson was electric with the ball in hand with a devastating step and the speed of a Slater or a Uate. But he is a wonderful playmaker too, setting up 19 tries in 16 games including seven in his four finals showings. This

kid is going to be a superstar, potentially one of the best players in the competition, and he is going to take the Warriors places in 2012.

Hooker ----- 8

Hooker has long been an issue for the Warriors with the likes of Aaron Heremaia, Lance Hohaia and Ian Henderson all performing capably in recent times without being exceptional. The position will be a problem no longer though with New Zealand astutely purchasing disgruntled ex-Titan Nathan Friend. Friend was arguably the Titans' best player in the club's first four years of existence and it was telling that Gold Coast claimed the wooden spoon last year when a shoulder injury restricted Friend to four games. He will start the season as a 31-year-old but he was a late bloomer, playing his first full season of top grade in 2006, so should provide plenty to the Warriors as a tackle-thirsty defender and a creative provider around the ruck.

Prop ----- 6.5

One of the key factors behind New Zealand's Grand Final push in 2011 was the coming of age of three talented prop forwards: Sam Rapira, Russell Packer and Ben Matulino. Rapira and Matulino, both 24, and Packer, 22, all played their best football last year and it laid a great platform for the likes of Kevin Locke, Shaun Johnson and James Maloney. Rapira's numbers were down a touch in last year's regular season, a result of knee and thumb injuries, but was in good nick come the finals. Packer has been a highly thought-of prospect since debuting at 18 but showed a good deal of maturity last year, particularly with his fitness levels, intensity and ball playing. Matulino has slipped under the radar somewhat but was arguably the Warriors' best prop, despite starting most games from the bench. He has played in every one of the Warriors' games over the last two seasons and is constantly bending the line. Queensland Origin forward Jacob Lillyman is likely to be the fourth prop used. He is an honest toiler. Steve Rapira, Ukuma Ta'ai and Upu Poching should all get opportunities off the bench.

Backrow ----- 7.5

The Warriors return with their same classy backrow, led by skipper Simon Mannering. Mannering is equally adept on both sides of the ball, running with plenty of vigour and tackling with a whole heap of oomph. Feleti Mateo is the creator in the backrow. When he is on song, he can be extremely damaging, combining skill and pace. He led the NRL in offloads last year and while he was a little loose, he was a good acquisition for the Warriors. Micheal Luck locks the scrum and is the starch in the middle of the defensive line. He tackles his bollocks off and his importance was seen when the Warriors set about losing when Luck was sidelined with injury. Elijah Taylor was a nice find who was another tackling type without much in the way of attack.

Blue Chip Players: 4- Manu Vatuvei (wing), Shaun Johnson (halfback), Simon Mannering (backrow), Nathan Friend (hooker)

Coach Rating: Brian McClellan (1st season at Warriors, 1st season in the NRL) -- **7**

Coach History:

W-L Record: 0-0
Finals Record: 0-0
Finals Seasons: 0
Premierships: 0
Club Record: 0-0

Coach Analysis: New Warriors coach Brian McClellan may be in his debut NRL season but he is no rookie with the 50-year-old having built a tremendous resume in New Zealand, England and at international level. The son of former St Helens head coach and former Kiwi assistant Mike, McClellan has a long history in the game that saw him join the inaugural Auckland Warriors team as an assistant to the under-16 team in 1995. He then achieved significant success in both the Auckland Rugby League and the Bartercard Cup before being appointed assistant to the national team and then head coach. As head coach, he led New Zealand to the 2005 Tri-Nations trophy, the first international trophy not won by Australia in 27 years. McClellan then took over Leeds for three seasons between 2008 and 2010 where he built a 73-28-1 record, guiding the Rhinos to two titles in his first two years as well the World Club Challenge in 2008. In 2011, McClellan led the Exiles to victory in the inaugural International Origin match. McClellan may not have played league at the top level but he has worked his way into an NRL job through a wonderful track record of success at every place he has coached. The Warriors will certainly miss Ivan Cleary but McClellan appears to have the capability to take the club to the next level with the team's inaugural title not beyond the realms of possibility under their new boss.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	14-10	6th	4-4	4-4	6-2	3-1	Grand Final	
2010	14-10	5th	3-5	6-2	5-3	0-1	Qualifying Final	
2009	7-15-2	14th	3-4-1	2-6	2-5-1	DNQ	--	
2008	13-11	8th	4-4	3-5	6-2	2-1	Preliminary Final	
2007	13-10-1	4th	4-4	3-5	6-1-1	0-2	Semi Final	

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
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--Debut Season--

Draw Analysis: The Warriors were remarkably consistent starting the season under Ivan Cleary, winning either three or four matches in the opening two months over the last six years. The club may have been an indifferent starting team. But for the most part, they have been one of the strongest teams down the stretch, winning five games or more in four of the last five years. The enigmatic Warriors tend to make the finals on the back of some hefty momentum garnered throughout July and August. Last year's Grand Finalists have a great opening to the season, playing three home matches in their first four and after a Grand Final rematch to open the season, play six non-finalists. The smallest break the Warriors have is six days in the first five rounds. Origin rarely impacts the Warriors too much and shouldn't again. New Zealand has its byes in rounds 12 and 16. The Warriors tend to get hot late but will have to knock off five finalists from 2011 in the last eight weeks. Expect the Warriors to have their best start in years. If they don't, be concerned. And if they get home in their usual way, they are going to be very hard to roll in September.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	17-11	8-4	9-7
2010	14-11	7-5	7-6
2009	7-15-2	5-7	2-8-2
2008	15-12	10-3	5-9
2007	13-12-1	8-5	5-7-1
Five-Year Total	66-61-3	38-24	28-37-3

Home and Away Analysis: The Warriors posted their first winning road record since 2003 two years ago and they followed that up with another in 2011. Ivan Cleary was big on getting New Zealand to travel well and Brian McClennan will need to follow a similar preparation. Facing greater travel issues than most, New Zealand have traditionally struggled away from home but have always been a dangerous premiership proposition when they are at least competitive on the road. Conversely, the Warriors have a major advantage when playing at home and it has shown in their recent 38-24 record at Mt Smart. The story is the same for the Warriors as it is every year: win away and stay in the hunt, lose in Australia and concede the season.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	7th	4th	15th	10th	3rd
Metres	4th	11th	3rd	5th	5th
Offloads	2nd	6th	2nd	2nd	1st
Tackle Breaks	9th	10th	5th	5th	6th
Errors	7th	3rd	13th	9th	10th

Defence Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	5th	5th	12th	10th	5th
Metres Conceded	5th	2nd	14th	3rd	4th
Missed Tackles	12th	9th	6th	4th	4th

Attack-Defence Ranking Analysis: As expected, the Warriors' defence slipped a little in 2011 following Brent Tate's move to North Queensland with the missed tackle ranking falling from ninth to 12th and metres conceded ranking dropping from second to fifth. While the missed tackle drop was concerning for the Warriors as the defensive standards slipped, they were solid close to their line, finishing fifth in points conceded. The Warriors attack regressed a little, at least in terms of style, to a pre-2009 way with offloads back up and with them errors. Points were down a touch but the most pleasing aspect of the attack was the return to the top-four in metres gained, highlighting what a good year props Russell Packer, Ben Matulino and Sam Rapira had.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	Manu Vatuvei	12
2010	Manu Vatuvei	20
2009	Manu Vatuvei	13
2008	Manu Vatuvei	16
2007	Manu Vatuvei, Jerome Ropati, Grant Rovelli	10

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 72 (11th) 2011 Key Position: 12 (6th)
2010: 65 (11th)

Games Lost Analysis: Again, the Warriors suffered worse-than-average health, making their Grand Final run more remarkable though it should be noted the Warriors lost only 12 games from their key position players. Injury-prone centre Jerome Ropati was again finished early, playing only three games, while fellow outside back Manu Vatuvei again battled leg injuries, missing nine games. Prop Sam Rapira missed 10 games while the Warriors lost both games in Micheal Luck's absence.

2011 Betting Analysis: The Warriors followed up their outstanding betting form of 2010 (16-9 ATS) with a 16-12 ATS record, taking them to 32-21 ATS over the last two years. They were also winning head-to-head propositions again, up \$1.26 over the course of the season. New Zealand were again outstanding road propositions, going

9-7 ATS to make their road record 18-11 ATS over the last two years. A 9-5 ATS mark as a favourite reaffirmed their standing as good chalk bets with a 16-9 ATS record as the punters' pick. At night, the Warriors are 19-12 ATS over the last two seasons while off a seven-day break they are 16-11 ATS. Good weather has been friendly to the Warriors, 23-15 ATS over two seasons and 13-9 ATS last year. The Warriors' average road price dropped to \$2.27 from \$2.70 but it was still a very profitable exercise taking New Zealand head-to-head on the road. Ivan Cleary's team fell from a 15-10 over team to an 18-10 under team in 2011. As an away underdog, the Warriors were 8-3 under while they were an amazing 13-3 under at night. In 2010 the Warriors had six of 25 games total 51-plus. Last year, it was just one of 28.

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$9.50

Minor Premiership: \$8.00

Top 4: \$2.50

Top 8: \$1.55

The Bookmaker: "The Warriors have an abundance of natural ability. There has to be a question mark over first-time NRL coach Brian McClennan but I'm prepared to back him and say the Warriors can go one better in 2012."

-Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

Mr Rugby Assessment: An established squad that are now one of the teams to beat. An amazing mix of power and skill, the Warriors are unbeatable at their best but they still have to fly across the ditch once a fortnight, not to mention that first Sunday in October. Bluey McClennan is a great man-manager but doubts surround his ability to thrive under the weekly spotlight of the NRL. Price: \$10.00

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 59 (5th)

Weighted Roster Rating: 73.6 (5th)

Predicted Finishing Range: 1st-9th

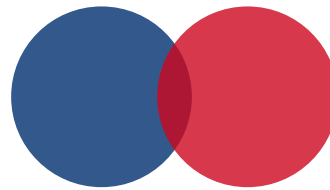
Predicted Finish: 4th

There is just so much to like about the Warriors this year that even though they lost their most successful coach and one of the most underrated mentors in the game, another big season is forecast. Making last year's Grand Final was remarkable considering the coaching drama, the high turnover of senior players and a pretty serious injury toll. They got hot when it counted and as traditional strong finishers, they will likely hit the 2012 finals with plenty of momentum. Though losing Cleary hurts, they found an extremely well qualified replacement, who won't miss a beat. They have made a tremendous acquisition in hooker Nathan Friend. Young halfback Shaun Johnson is perhaps the hottest prospect to come out of New Zealand since

Stacey Jones. The club has depth, having made the Grand Finals in all three grades last year. A well-balanced forward pack that runs deep with match-winners at fullback and on the wing top it off. There is a small chance things don't click with all the changes. But the likelihood is that New Zealand will be a major force capable of going all the way in 2012. If they can find a young centre, they may well be premiership favourites sooner rather than later.

2012 Betting Advice: The Warriors are certainly a premiership chance with the \$10.0 available at Sportsbet worth an interest though it may be wise to wait. New Zealand are traditionally only fair starters and despite having an easy draw, could well drift in the early weeks. Though the Warriors have a new coach, they have strength and depth across the park and are a team who usually get hot for the finals. Well worth investing in. Weekly, the Warriors can be tried. They are particularly strong as a favourite and on the road. After a fantastic under season they can again be forecast to play in low scoring games.

NEWCASTLE KNIGHTS



Strongest Team

1. Darius Boyd (fb/w)
2. Akuila Uate (w)
3. Alex McKinnon (c)
4. Junior Sau (c)
5. James McManus (w)
6. Kurt Gidley (hb/fb/fe/h)
7. Jarrod Mullen (fe/hb)
13. Matt Hilder (br/h)
12. Zeb Taia (br)
11. Chris Houston (br)
10. Neville Costigan (p/br)
9. Danny Buderus (h)
8. Kade Snowden (p)

-
14. Ryan Stig (fe)
 15. Richie Fa'aoso (p/br)
 16. Joel Edwards (br/p)
 17. Evarn Tuimavave (p)

Others: Timana Tahu (c/w), Wes Naiqama (c/w/fb), Siuatonga Likikiki (c), Kevin Naiqama (c/w/fb), Marvin Karawana (br), Kyle O'Donnell (br), Maipele Morseau (fb), Korbin Sims (br/p), Chris Adams (h), Ethan Cook (br), Marvin Filipo (br), Peter Mata'utai (w/fb), Tyrone Roberts (fe/hb/c), Zane Tetevano (br), Robbie Rochow (br), Adam Cuthbertson (br/p), Sam Anderson (p), Daine Laurie (p), Mark Wade (br), Rodney Mason (br), Chanel Mata'utai (c/w), Chad Redman (h), Will Smith (fe)

Gains: Darius Boyd (St George-Illawarra), Kade Snowden (Cronulla), Danny Buderus (Leeds), Adam Cuthbertson (St George-Illawarra), Timana Tahu (Penrith), Robbie Rochow (Melbourne), Alex McKinnon (St George-Illawarra), Daine Laurie (Penrith)

Losses: Isaac De Gois (Cronulla), Cameron Ciraldo (Penrith), Adam MacDougall (Retired), Antonio Kaufusi (Harlequins), Mark Taufua (Cronulla), Keith Lulia (Bradford), Ben Rogers (Retired), Steve Southern (Wakefield), Dan Tolar (Retired), Shannon McDonnell (Hull KR), Con Mika (Hull KR)

Net Recruitment Assessment: With Wayne Bennett comes Churchill Medal winner Darius Boyd, who has been one of the best players in the competition over the last two seasons. He is a very good kick returner but his great skill is an ability to play as a third half with his pass as good as any in the game. His move to Newcastle

should ensure Kurt Gidley is regularly used in the halves. Boyd wasn't the only exciting purchase with club legend Danny Buderus and local junior Kade Snowden returning. Even at 34 years of age, Buderus remains capable of playing at a high level and should provide a legitimate title contender with genuine direction in the ruck. Snowden had an injury-ravaged 2011 but at his best is an international quality prop. The signings of Timana Tahu and Adam Cuthbertson do little to excite but Alex McKinnon and Robbie Rochow are both promising kids who should get their chance in the top grade. A total of 11 first graders have been moved on but only Isaac De Gois, Keith Lulia and Cameron Ciraldo are much chop and all positions there are adequately covered. The Knights were huge winners over the offseason.

Representative Losses: (Likely) Kurt Gidley, Akuila Uate, Darius Boyd. (Possible) Junior Sau, Kade Snowden, Danny Buderus, Chris Houston.

Position Ratings:

Fullback ----- 9.5

The Knights are flush at fullback this year with Wayne Bennett able to choose between two internationals in Darius Boyd and Kurt Gidley. With Gidley likely to play five-eighth, new boy Boyd will wear the No.1 jersey, though both will play similar roles. Boyd has been excellent since moving to fullback three years ago, playing a significant role in the Dragons' 2010 title. Boyd plays mistake-free football with a craftiness when joining the line and a deceptive change of pace. Will continue to thrive under Bennett.

Three Quarters ----- 8

There is no better or more dangerous winger in the game than Akuila Uate. He is a legitimate wing superstar who has scored 52 tries in 68 career games with the Knights, often playing at the end of an ordinary backline. That won't be the case this year. Uate can create his own try and can sizzle from anywhere on the paddock. His involvement is also exceptional, finishing with the fourth-highest average metres last season among players who played 10 games. Former international Timana Tahu is favoured to start at right centre in his return to the Knights but he has been ordinary at best since returning from rugby union with Bennett every chance of opting for promising former St George-Illawarra centre Alex McKinnon (a move he should make). McKinnon looked excellent in three first grade starts at the Dragons and is one of the hottest outside back prospects in the game. On the left, Junior Sau and James McManus are expected to combine. Sau is a bullocking player and a top class defensive centre who rarely scores but he has a subtle step that can create issues for opposition defenders. McManus is a safe type who is no speedster but always reliable. Depth in the three-quarter line is also strong with Wes Naiqaima capable of playing well anywhere in the backline and promising trio Siuatonga Likikiki, Kevin Naiqama and Peter Mata'utai all capable of slotting into first grade. Mata'utai, in particular, showed plenty of potential in 2011.

Five-Eighth ----- 9

After four seasons playing predominantly fullback, Kurt Gidley looks set to shift back into the halves on a permanent basis. Gidley has all the tools to play in the halves and is an elite playmaker. His greatest asset in the halves may be taking the pressure off often-flustered partner Jarrod Mullen. One of the best players in the NRL, Gidley will thrive back in the halves.

Halfback ----- 6.5

Jarrod Mullen will be hoping for the magic touch of Wayne Bennett to turn his career around after another disappointing season in 2011. Mullen, always highly touted and a former Origin half, has not developed with his hands a concern and his football smarts highly questionable. There is potential there and the Knights faithful will be hoping for a Jamie Soward-like improvement but Mullen will have only limited time to show he can play at a high level consistency with the talented Ryan Stig able to step in and excel.

Hooker ----- 7

In a return that will have every Knights fan with a tear in their eye and hope in their heart, loyal clubman Danny Buderus has signed on for a season under Wayne Bennett after three productive if not all-together happy years at Leeds. Buderus is without question one of the great Knights, a premiership winner and Origin captain, one of the best rakes of the modern era. He will be 34 when the season starts though and hasn't played in the NRL since 2008. You have to give Bennett the benefit of the doubt but Knights fans should not expect the Buderus who they last saw in Knights colours though he is reportedly fit as a bull. Lock Matt Hilder will serve as a capable backup.

Prop ----- 7

Kade Snowden returns to the Knights after four years at the Sharks, where he developed into an international prop. Released during Brian Smith's purge of the club, Snowden returns to the Knights as a big-money prop with heavy expectations from the faithful. The 25-year-old struggled with injury and contract-related distraction last year but at his best is a major upgrade in the front row for the Knights, replacing Antonio Kaufusi, Mark Taufua and Dan Tolar, who were all moved on. Neville Costigan is likely to start as the other bookend. Costigan spent most of last year in the second row but due to a fairly ordinary rotation and Bennett's like of playing him at prop, he will start as a front rower. Richie Fa'aoso is a dynamic type who makes a solid impact from the bench. Evarn Tuimavave and Adam Cuthbertson will both get time in the top grade while Joel Edwards, a real goer, could be used up front if injuries hit.

Backrow ----- 7.5

Newcastle have a keen but underrated backrow led by the redeemed Chris Houston. Houston was magnificent last season after missing 2010 on a drug trafficking charge. The lanky backrower was a 35/80 player who was a perennial

threat when hitting hard on the fringes. He should be in the mix for Origin this season. Matt Hilder is used all over the shop but should get the No.13 jersey this year. Hilder busts his hump tackling and will hopefully be used as an 80-minute player by Bennett. Zeb Taia is a magnificent running backrower who had his season cruelly ruined by a serious neck injury that threatened his career. Taia made it back for the qualifying final against Melbourne and will hopefully return to his best as he rates among the premier fringe backrowers. Neville Costigan will likely play front row but is a hard nut more accustomed to the second row. Joel Edwards is one of the hardest hitters in the game, a magnificent defender who can change the momentum of matches with his tackling. He has a bright future. Robbie Rochow has come across from Melbourne and has been highly touted for a long time. He has significant upside.

Blue Chip Players: 5- Darius Boyd (fullback), Akuila Uate (wing), Kurt Gidley (five-eighth), Chris Houston (backrow), Kade Snowden (prop)

Coach Rating: Wayne Bennett (1st season at Newcastle, 26th in the NRL) ----- **10**

Coach History:

W-L Record: 402-217-13

Finals Record: 27-27

Finals Seasons: 22

Premierships: 7

Club Record: 0-0

Coach Analysis: The greatest coach in rugby league history, Bennett confirmed his standing by leading the Dragons to their first title as a merged club and the first St George premierships in over 30 years. Such is his influence, Newcastle have been installed as premierships favourites with a number of bookmakers despite the club having only a solitary finals win over the last decade. Bennett has not missed the finals since 1991, winning seven premierships and never losing a Grand Final over that time. Bennett completely changed the Dragons' identity from a flashy club with a soft underbelly to a hardened outfit renowned for grinding teams down. He will do something similar at Newcastle, adding more backbone in defence and a little more structure in attack. With his reputation, he is a master recruiter and as such there are a number of big names heading to Newcastle this season. Tactically, he has not lost his touch. He is a wonderful developer of talent, something that will be a major factor now he is at the wonderful rugby league nursery that is the Hunter. His greatest characteristic as a coach, however, is his ability to get players to buy into his way: his training, his preparation, his game plans, his style. Wayne Bennett is simply the greatest of all-time, having come a long way since learning at the knee of Bob Bax in Queensland, and has made Newcastle a far better team because of his presence. The club will also benefit by having the best assistant in the NRL in Rick Stone, who has led Newcastle from the end of 2009. Stone has done a tremendous job with limited resources, getting the most out of nearly all his players. Having Stone should make Bennett's transition to the Knights silky-smooth.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	12-12	8th	4-4	4-4	4-4	0-1	Qualifying	Final
2010	10-14	11th	3-5	4-4	3-5	DNQ	--	
2009	13-11	7th	5-3	4-4	4-4	0-1	Qualifying	Final
2008	12-12	9th	4-4	3-5	5-3	DNQ	--	
2007	9-15	15th	4-4	4-4	1-7	DNQ	--	

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	14-9-1	5th	7-1	4-3-1	3-5	0-2	Semi	Final
2010	17-7	1st	7-1	5-3	5-3	3-0	Premiers	
2009	17-7	1st	6-2	6-2	5-3	0-2	Semi	Final
2008	14-9-1	5th	6-2	2-5-1	6-2	1-1	Semi	Final
2007	11-13	8th	3-5	5-3	3-5	0-1	Qualifying	Final

Draw Analysis: There has been no more consistent team in the NRL than the Newcastle Knights, who have won between three and five matches in every eight-game divide over the last five years with the exception of the end of 2007. That trend of mediocrity is somewhat foreign to new coach Wayne Bennett. His sides have opened a combined 26-6 over the last four years with a 6-2 start his worst. His teams have had varying success over the Origin period before tending to finish with a winning record. We should be able to get a good grip on how good this new-look Knights team is over the first third of the season. Newcastle open at home against Bennett's old team St George-Illawarra and get them again in round seven, the Broncos at home in round three and the Storm in Melbourne in round five. If Bennett's recent starts continue, the Knights will win at least a couple of those games and should be near the top end of the table. Newcastle get their byes in rounds 11 and 15 with the first one particularly useful considering their likely strong rep contingent. They will play Canberra and Parramatta prior to Origins II and III without same. The Knights play last year's Grand Finalists in consecutive weeks in rounds 19 and 20 before getting four non-finalists in their last six. There are big expectations for the Knights this year and the first eight weeks should provide a pretty good guide on how they will perform in the first year of the Bennett era.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	12-13	7-5	5-8
2010	10-14	6-6	4-8
2009	13-12	10-2	3-10
2008	12-12	7-5	5-7
2007	9-15	4-8	5-7
Five-Year Total	56-66	34-26	22-40

Home and Away Analysis: Considering how close Newcastle is to Sydney and the fact they get a good number of away matches just down the road at Gosford, the Knights have a disgraceful road record over the last four seasons, winning only 34.5% of the time away from Energy Australia Stadium. Wayne Bennett will not tolerate such a dramatic drop in form when away from home, having built Brisbane (once a rugby league outpost at least in terms of the Sydney competition) into a strong road team. At home, the Knights have been solid and while there is a home ground advantage, it is not overwhelming.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	9th	11th	11th	6th	14th
Metres	9th	14th	13th	3rd	12th
Offloads	11th	11th	8th	6th	9th
Tackle Breaks	1st	7th	9th	6th	11th
Errors	8th	11th	10th	8th	9th

Defence Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	14th	9th	7th	16th	10th
Metres Conceded	3rd	4th	2nd	13th	4th
Missed Tackles	12th	4th	6th	10th	4th

Attack-Defence Rankings Analysis: After a solid year in 2008 with the ball in hand, the Knights have fallen away in attack. Errors have been an issue as has go-forward and the result has been a struggle in scoring points. Defensively, Newcastle had a horrid 2010. They leaked plenty of points and in a manner not particularly Novacastrian, missing too many tackles and not showing much pride in the line. The move of Gidley to halfback should help the Knights in regards points (though it will hurt the metres

gained) so their attack should improve but defence remains a query. They won't be an elite defensive unit but can they get to the point where their defence is not a liability? That is the major task for Rick Stone and the major query of Knights fans.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	Akuila Uate	20
2010	Akuila Uate	21
2009	Jarrold Mullen	10
2008	Kurt Gidley	9
2007	James McManus	10

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 72 (11th) 2011 Key Position: 23 (13th)
 2010: 74 (13th)

Games Lost Analysis: The Knights were again hit hard by injury, a seemingly every-year scenario in the Hunter. Key positions were a worry with star Kurt Gidley missing seven games, Jarrold Mullen four and Isaac De Gois eight. There were a number of long-term injuries as well with a neck injury keeping Zeb Taia to only five games and the usual ailments ensuring Adam MacDougall played only nine matches. Queensland forward Neville Costigan missed 10 games with a broken arm. Sound depth outside the key positions saved the Knights but a lack of quality in the halves and at fullback certainly told.

2011 Betting Analysis: The Knights went 13-12 ATS and are now 23-26 ATS over the last two years. An 8-5 ATS record on the road was up from 4-8 ATS the previous year but their 5-7 ATS home record was down a win from the previous year. On the road, punters won \$1.40 by playing \$1 on Newcastle every game. As an away underdog, the Knights went 8-5 ATS while they were particularly strong when getting less than a converted try, going 7-4 ATS, but both have not held strong over the last two years. Newcastle were very good bets in afternoon matches, going 10-4 against the line, and they were a perfect 5-0 ATS when getting a seven-day break but were a poor 0-3 ATS off Monday Night Football and an ordinary 1-4 ATS in the wet. Totals over 51 involving the Knights fell from nine in 2010 to five last year with Newcastle becoming one of the leading under teams, going 16-9 under. This was partially due to an improved defence and partially due to bookmakers skewing high with their totals. On the road, the Knights have been a very good under bet, going 9-4 under last year and 16-9 under over the last two years. Newcastle were a sound under bet in night games, going 8-3 under while they were 2-0 under off a bye, making them 4-0 under off byes over the last two years. The best totals situation for Newcastle is the under in wet weather. The Knights went 5-0 under in rain-affected games last year and 10-1 under over the last two seasons.

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$9.00

Minor Premiership: \$7.00

Top 4: \$2.35

Top 8: \$1.45

The Bookmaker: "Wayne Bennett – say no more. The broom has been put through the coalfields but there is no doubt that this looks a stronger team than last year. Bennett may need 12 months but I can see them going through undefeated at home with crowds back at the size they were when Joey, Chief, Butts and Bustling Billy Peden were going around. The only shame is that Mad Dog has packed up his boots."

-Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

Mr Rugby Assessment: I'm not as bullish as most bookies but I expect the Knights to challenge this year. Perhaps they are a little thin in the three-quarters and at hooker but Wayne Bennett has been known to find the odd match-winner from nowhere. Jarrod Mullen does need to realise his potential if the Knights are to be genuine hopes but I suspect this club will peak in 2-3 years. Price: \$12.00

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 64.5 (1st)

Weighted Roster Rating: 80.9 (2nd)

Predicted Finishing Range: 1st-8th

Predicted Finish: 2nd

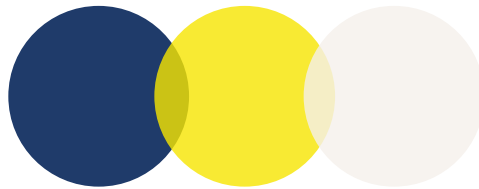
"They said to the woman, 'We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world'." John 4:42

That is the mentality in Newcastle this year as the town steadies itself for a season of frenzy. Hope is in the heart. Wayne Bennett, the greatest coach of all, who's sidekick is success, has arrived. Nathan Tinkler, the local boy done good, the big fella, has pumped the club up with cash. Danny Buderus, the old skipper, a local hero, returns. Nothing is impossible in Newcastle this year, at least in the minds of the Novocastrians who believe the new coach and the new owner will have an immediate impact. And he will. On paper, Newcastle have arguably the strongest roster in the NRL. The backline will likely contain seven players who have played Origin or international football. The spine consists of three internationals and an Origin half. The forward pack is a nice blend of hard workers, hard hitters and hard nuts. With Wayne Bennett giving them direction, it is hard not to see Newcastle improving in front of packed crowds. While it has been almost a decade since the Knights seriously contended, they have been remarkable in their consistency of late, an effort that must be recognised considering the club's limited resources and talent. Newcastle is a team with a strong culture that works hard. With greater resources

and the supercoach, the only way is up. Newcastle will again be playing finals football. They should be at least in a preliminary final. They can go all the way. It is a new dawn in Newcastle and the sun shines brightly.

2012 Betting Advice: Newcastle may be premierships contenders this year for the first time since Andrew Johns wore the No.7 but bookmakers have found them, presenting little value. Wayne Bennett is the greatest of them all but even he has not won a premiership in his first year at a club and there are question marks over the depth of the forward pack. As favourites or near-favourites, there is no value. Those who do want to try them for the title, however, should wait until they play the Dragons for a second time. Newcastle have a tough start to the season and may find it hard to get away with their price drifting to a more backable price. There are few trends worth following on a week-to-week basis though they can be reliably tried as an unders proposition. The Knights were 16-9 under last year and Wayne Bennett is very much an under coach, going 35-18 under over the last two seasons. Betting Newcastle matches under in the wet is one of the better bets (10-1 under over the last two years) while on the road Newcastle are 16-9 under over the last two seasons.

NORTH QUEENSLAND COWBOYS



Strongest Team

1. Matt Bowen (fb/fe)
2. Kalifa Faifai-Loa (w)
3. Brent Tate (c)
4. Kane Linnett (c/w)
5. Ashley Graham (c/w/fe)
6. Robert Lui (hb/fe)
7. Johnathan Thurston (hb)
13. Dallas Johnson (br)
12. Gavin Cooper (br)
11. Tariq Sims (p/br)
10. Matt Scott (p)
9. Aaron Payne (h)
8. James Tamou (p/br)

-
14. Glenn Hall (br/p)
 15. James Taumalolo (br/p)
 16. Scott Bolton (br)
 17. James Segeyaro (h/hb)

Others: Dane Hogan (br), Michael Morgan (fe/hb), Ray Thompson (fe/hb), Antonio Winterstein (w), Ashton Sims (p), Ben Jones (c/fe/hb/h), Jack Cooper (br), Blake Leary (br), Tyson Martin (br), Cory Paterson (br), Joel Riethmuller (br), Luke Harlen (p), Ricky Thorby (p), Elijah Niko (c/w/fb), Kyle Feldt (c), Callum Haywood (br), Sam Hoare (p), Tyson Martin (br), Moses Pangai (c)

Gains: Kane Linnett (Sydney Roosters), Robert Lui (Wests Tigers), Luke Harlen (Cronulla), Elijah Niko (Melbourne)

Losses: Willie Tonga (Parramatta), Will Tupou (Rugby Union), Leeson Ah Mau (St George-Illawarra), Clint Amos (Retired)

Net Recruitment Assessment: The Cowboys lost international centre Willie Tonga but might almost be a better team for his departure as the renowned ball hog rarely allowed winger Kalifa Faifai-Loa to get free. He will be replaced by former Rooster Kane Linnett; a dour but strong player who looks to be well grounded in the fundamentals of the game. The purchase of Robert Lui is an odd one, particularly after Ray Thompson played well at five-eighth last year. It would seem a play also destined for disaster given his history of domestic violence. The Cowboys won't miss Will Tupou, Leeson Ah Mau or Clint Amos.

Representative Losses: (Likely) Johnathan Thurston, Matt Scott. (Possible) Dallas Johnson, Brent Tate, Tariq Sims, Kalifa Faifai-Loa.

Position Ratings:

Fullback ----- 6.5

It looked like Bowen was on his way out heading into last season after a number of serious knee injuries but had a major comeback season, playing very well, even doing a serviceable job as the Cowboys' sole playmaker at times. He has lost a lot of the zip he was once renowned for but he plays with smarts and his playmaking has improved. His poor kick return is a concern and he is no longer an elite fullback but he fits the Cowboys style well enough.

Three Quarters ----- 7

The Cowboys have built a nice three-quarter line over the last two seasons with reliable international Brent Tate the centrepiece. The 23-Test veteran only played nine games last year as he came back from yet another serious knee injury but by season's end he had hit stride. One of the best defensive centres in the game, Tate provides sound leadership and football smarts to a team desperately in need of both. Though Tate has lost an international as his centre partner in Willie Tonga, the Cowboys are better off with former Rooster Kane Linnett. Linnett has plenty of ability and is not nearly the ball hog Tonga is. That will help the ultra-talented Kalifa Faifai-Loa, who was at his best when Tonga was away. Faifai-Loa managed to score 10 tries despite getting little ball (he crossed for two doubles in the five weeks Tonga was out hurt) and his kick return was excellent. He is set for a breakout season. Ashley Graham won North Queensland's Player of the Year award after an excellent season on the wing where he averaged over 140 metres a match. Antonio Winterstein provides good depth.

Five-Eighth ----- 5.5

The Cowboys made a risky play in the offseason by recruiting troubled Tigers half Robert Lui, clearly with the intention of partnering Lui with skipper Johnathan Thurston. It was an interesting recruitment decision considering Lui's legal predicament and the improvement of Ray Thompson last season. Lui has shown some ability but has been wildly inconsistent with his defence almost non-existent. A player who needs his hands on the ball, he looks a poor fit at North Queensland. Thompson will be waiting in the wings but his confidence will be an issue if he does get a run after his shoddy treatment.

Halfback ----- 9.5

After a couple of disappointing seasons at club level, two-time Dally M medallist Johnathan Thurston was back to his best in 2011, benefitting from a good forward pack and a more penetrating backline. He excels at everything a halfback needs to and before he suffered a leg injury in Origin III, was arguably the best player in the NRL. Seems to have matured somewhat and is one of the game's most influential players when fully fit.

Hooker ----- 5.5

North Queensland stalwart Aaron Payne is in the final year of his contract and on 2011 form he could well lose the starting spot he has called his own since 2004. Payne was solid enough for the Cowboys last year but the more dynamic James Segeyaro burst onto the scene in 2011 and could win the job this year. They are contrasting players: Payne the stoic defender, Segeyaro the hard runner and ball player. They can co-exist but it seems that North Queensland are a better team when the latter is on the park.

Prop ----- 7.5

Matt Scott is the best prop in the NRL and quite possibly the world. Averaging 115 metres and 25 tackles per, Scott is the leader of not only the Cowboys pack but arguably Queensland's and Australia's. His hard running is the best part of his game. If he is on song, Thurston at least has a platform to work from. James Tamou was the surprise development last year. His discipline is a worry but he goes at 21/105 and is adept at busting tackles. James Taumalolo is the hottest prospect in town and could be another find like Tariq Sims. The terrible Ashton Sims will probably get some time while Glenn Hall is serviceable as a bench forward.

Backrow ----- 7.5

Dallas Johnson returned to the NRL after a season in France and it was like he never left. He tackled, tackled, got concussed, tackled, got concussed and tackled some more. He was the perfect purchase for the Cowboys, who needed a solid defender to build around in the centre of the field. Tariq Sims has a massive boom on him and was exceptional after debuting, mentioned as a possible Origin candidate for New South Wales. He was most dangerous and has a huge reach on him that wreaks havoc with defences. Gavin Cooper enjoyed one his finest season and sits in the middle of Johnson and Sims in terms of style. Scott Bolton had a quiet year but was suffering plenty of niggles and should bounce back strongly this year. Glenn Hall can go though he lacks a real identity in terms of style. Dane Hogan is a player I like who looks to be full of courage. Hopefully he will kick on this season.

Blue Chip Players: 5- Kalifa Faifai-Loa (wing), Brent Tate (centre), Johnathan Thurston (halfback), Dallas Johnson (backrow), Matthew Scott (prop)

Coach Rating: Neil Henry (4th season at North Queensland, 6th in the NRL) --- 5.5

Coach History:

W-L Record: 52-70

Finals Record: 0-2

Finals Seasons: 2

Premierships: 0

Club Record: 30-43

Coach Analysis: Neil Henry saved his coaching career last season by guiding North Queensland to the finals after a three-season absence. Henry was well and truly on the hot seat heading into last year and deservedly so after finishes of 12th and 15th in his first two seasons at the Cowboys. He deserves to again be under pressure and with only two years left on his deal, he is. Henry was the beneficiary of both good recruitment and a good run with injuries in 2011 but, to be fair, deserves some credit for the former, having decided to clear out many of the troublemakers who had hamstrung the club. It certainly appeared that Henry was a lot more flexible tactically in 2011 but it should not be forgotten that he has long been regarded as a poor man manager with a history of authoritarian and alienating behaviour. Henry has coached five seasons in the NRL and has still yet to win a final with his career starting to look a lot like that of former Raiders and Panthers boss Matt Elliott. He built his coaching reputation on his work with the Queensland State of Origin team but he is going to need to turn the Cowboys into a top-four team this season and win a final if he is to get his deal at North Queensland extended. Former Castleford coach Terry Matterson joins as an assistant and could be positioned as a viable alternative if the Cowboys regress this season under Henry.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	14-10	7th	6-2	5-3	3-5	0-1	Qualifying Final	
2010	5-19	15th	2-6	2-6	1-7	DNQ	--	
2009	11-13	12th	3-5	6-2	2-6	DNQ	--	
2008	5-19	15th	3-5	0-8	2-6	DNQ	--	
2007	15-9	3rd	6-2	4-4	5-3	2-1	Preliminary Final	

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	14-10	7th	6-2	5-3	3-5	0-1	Qualifying Final	
2010	5-19	15th	2-6	2-6	1-7	DNQ	--	
2009	11-13	12th	3-5	6-2	2-6	DNQ	--	
2008	13-11	6th	3-5	4-4	6-2	0-1	Qualifying Final	
2007	9-15	14th	3-5	3-5	3-5	DNQ	--	

Draw Analysis: Not surprisingly, considering their volatile nature from season-to-season, the Cowboys have been all over the shop in their divides. They have generally been a poor starting team but turned that around last year. With only the Broncos and Storm as finalist match-ups in the first eight weeks, Neil Henry will have every opportunity to position the Cowboys in the eight early. Failure to do so and North Queensland could be in for a long season. The Cowboys have their byes in rounds 14 and 18, later than the majority of teams. That means against Penrith and at

New Zealand will be without Johnathan Thurston, certainly a net loss in the Warriors match. The run home is a shocker for the Cowboys, who cop six finalists from last year in their final eight. Trips to the Storm and the Dragons are the worst so they will need to find wins at home against some of the Tigers, Sea Eagles, Warriors or Knights if they are to sneak into the finals. If they don't start well though, you can put a line through the Cowboys early.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	14-11	9-3	5-8
2010	5-19	4-8	1-11
2009	11-13	7-5	4-8
2008	5-19	3-9	2-10
2007	17-10	10-4	7-6
Five-Year Total	52-72	33-29	19-43

Home and Away Analysis: Winning less than 31% of your road games is not a recipe for success and when combined with a 33-29 home record then the Cowboys consistent mediocrity is not surprising. The Cowboys had their strongest home and away records since 2007 last year but North Queensland are a lowly 12-37 away from Townsville over the last four seasons.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	2nd	14th	4th	13th	5th
Metres	14th	13th	12th	15th	16th
Offloads	6th	9th	12th	8th	4th
Tackle Breaks	3rd	11th	15th	16th	8th
Errors	5th	12th	11th	12th	11th

Defence Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	8th	16th	5th	14th	12th
Metres Conceded	4th	13th	1st	4th	12th
Missed Tackles	14th	14th	7th	8th	15th

Attack-Defence Ranking Analysis: The Cowboys needed to fix up a number of key areas after coming last in 2010 and they did so on both sides of the ball. In attack there was a strong focus on not turning the ball over with North Queensland

ranking 11th or worse the previous four seasons, improving to fifth in 2011. Tackle Breaks also improved from bottom-six the past three seasons to third on the back of Matt Bowen, Willie Tonga, James Tamou and Tariq Sims all averaging at least four per game. Metres made were again poor but overall the attack improved immeasurably. A look at the inconsistency among the Cowboys' attacking metrics, however, suggests improvement one year does not necessarily mean long-term changes. Defensively, North Queensland remained a poor tackling team but showed greater desire around their own line this season, improving from 16th to eighth in points allowed. The Cowboys need to follow the lead of Dallas Johnson defensively and make their tackles if they are to again be a top-eight team.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	Ashley Graham	12
2010	Willie Tonga	12
2009	Willie Tonga, Matt Bowen	12
2008	John Williams, Ashley Graham	10
2007	Matt Bowen	22

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 41 (3rd) 2011 Key Position: 8 (3rd)
 2010: 53 (7th)

Games Lost Analysis: North Queensland again had a sweet run with injuries and it was a big contributing factor in their move back into the finals. The most important absence was that of Johnathan Thurston, who missed time due to Origin and a knee injury sustained in game three of the series. The Cowboys went around six times without their talismanic halfback. Recruit Brent Tate missed the first 16 games as he recovered from a serious knee injury while damaging young forward Tariq Sims broke his leg and missed the last two games.

2011 Betting Analysis: The Cowboys turned around their 9-15 ATS 2010 betting record to go 14-11 ATS. Level stakes bettors who took them both home and away profited \$4.89 by seasons' end, the second best return of any club behind only Melbourne. An 8-4 ATS home record takes their home stand to 15-9 ATS in the last two years but it was the four-game improvement to 6-7 ATS on the road that was most notable. As a home favourite the Cowboys went 7-2 ATS, taking their record as a home favourite to 10-4 ATS over the last two years, a noteworthy trend. When favoured by a converted try or less, they were 5-2 against the number. The Cowboys did not cover once when given 6.5 points or more last year, going 0-4 ATS and 4-13 ATS over the last two seasons. In terms of totals, the Cows were a 14-11 over team, going 7-5 over at home and 7-6 over on the road. As a home underdog, the total went over three times in as many matches but there have been no major totals

trends with North Queensland. Though the Cowboys' over totals improved, they allowed six games to tally less than 30, up from two in 2010.

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$16.00

Minor Premiership: \$15.00

Top 4: \$4.00

Top 8: \$1.85

The Bookmaker: "North Queensland were cruising in 2011 when injuries post-Origin cruelled their chances. Have a super outfit in 2012 but the big question is can the Cowboys win the big semis in Sydney come September." -Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

Mr Rugby Assessment: I can't fault the quality of this squad but JT seems to focus so hard on Origin it affects his form at club level. Road form is also a worry but I would be mad to write them off. A good footy sides lurks somewhere in this extended squad. Price: \$18.00

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 54.5 (9th)

Weighted Roster Rating: 67.8 (8th)

Predicted Finishing Range: 5th-16th

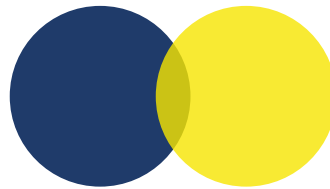
Predicted Finish: 9th

Arguably the best recruitment class in Cowboys history led to the club turning around a wooden spoon season with a finals appearance in 2011. What Dallas Johnson and Brent Tate brought to the club was an understanding of winning, strong leadership and a belief in self-sacrifice, three features sadly missing from the culture of the Cowboys. Combined with the stoic hard work of Gavin Cooper, the sizzle of Kalifa Faifai-Loa and the emergence of moose Tariq Sims, the Cowboys resembled a strong and consistent rugby league team. And they were right in the mix until a Jonathan Thurston injury in Origin III saw the club finish the season 3-6 (beating only Gold Coast, Cronulla and Penrith who combined for 22 wins all year). The Cowboys again look strong on paper with the loss of Willie Tonga likely to be a positive. The forward pack is strong, real rep quality and well-balanced, while the outside backs look dangerous. The real problem for Neil Henry though is in the key positions and the over-reliance on Johnathan Thurston. Matt Bowen is capable but aging, Robert Lui is beset by off-field woes and Aaron Payne is in a real battle to keep his job. Any team would struggle without Thurston but the Cowboys, due to having one of the weakest spines in the NRL, are crippled without their star halfback. North Queensland should be around the fringe of the eight but such a reliance on one

player and a long-term culture of waving the white flag when the going gets tough, there are no certainties. The downside is certainly bigger than the up and on the basis of being a traditionally poor defensive team, my feeling is that they will just miss out. This could be a year of transition for North Queensland: Neil Henry, Matt Bowen, Aaron Payne all must put up. It is going to be win or perish, one would imagine.

2012 Betting Advice: There is not much that excites me in futures markets regarding the Cowboys. The one futures wager I will be getting involved in is having North Queensland come last at \$21 at Flemington Sportsbet. The Cowboys should be a fringe eight team but just one injury to Johnathan Thurston can bring an entire season undone and North Queensland is a club with a strong history of throwing the towel in when the going gets tough. If they get off to a poor start, they are absolute runners for the spoon. Same allows punters to back big minuses in games where North Queensland are distinctly unfancied. North Queensland can get thrashed and are a poor 4-13 ATS over the past two years when the opposition was favoured by more than a converted try. They are strong home favourite propositions as well but that is where their trending ends.

PARRAMATTA EELS



Strongest Team

1. Jarryd Hayne (fb/w/c/fe)
2. Luke Burt (fb/w)
3. Willie Tonga (c)
4. Esi Tonga (c)
5. Ryan Morgan (c/w)
6. Ben Roberts (fe/hb/h/c)
7. Chris Sandow (hb)
13. Justin Horo (br/p)
12. Reni Maitua (br)
11. Nathan Hindmarsh (br)
10. Fuihui Moimoi (p)
9. Matt Keating (h)
8. Tim Mannah (p)

-
14. Justin Poore (p)
 15. Shane Shackleton (br/p)
 16. Casey Maguire (hb/fe/h)
 17. Ben Smith (br/c)

Others: Mitchell Allgood (p), Jordan Atkins (w/c), Jacob Loko (c/br), Eni Folau (c/w), Marmin Barba (fb/fe), Rory Brien (c/br), Taniela Lasalo (br), Pat O'Hanlon (br), Ken Sio (w), Taulima Tautai (br/w), Jon Mannah (p), Nathan Smith (br), Joseph Paulo (br/p), Jake Mullaney (fb), Cheyse Blair (c/w), Daniel Penese (br), Peni Terepo (p), Matthew Ryan (br), Troy Savage (c)

Gains: Chris Sandow (South Sydney), Willie Tonga (North Queensland), Ben Roberts (Canterbury), Esi Tonga (Gold Coast), Taulima Tautai (Cronulla), Jake Mullaney (Wests Tigers), Daniel Penese (St George-Illawarra), Cheyse Blair (Sydney Roosters), Jon Mannah (Cronulla), Joseph Paulo (Penrith), Nathan Smith (Canterbury)

Losses: Jeff Robson (Cronulla), Daniel Mortimer (Sydney Roosters), Joel Reddy (Wests Tigers), Chris Hicks (Retired), Carl Webb (Retired), Paul Whatuira (Retired), Chris Walker (Retired), Tom Humble (Wests Tigers), Manase Manuokafoa (Released), Etu Uaisele (Penrith)

Net Recruitment Assessment: In the first edition of this guide last year, I wrote that "those in charge of recruitment and retention at Parramatta should be shot. They have made an absolute mess of an already ordinary roster". And so it came to pass with four recruits retiring midseason. This year's recruitment class is only marginally better. They have signed halves Chris Sandow and Ben Roberts, the former who is constantly dealing with off-field issues while the latter is as consistent

as bad porridge. Yet Daniel Mortimer was released. Both Sandow and Roberts are individualists though who along with chief loner Jarryd Hayne, leave the Eels without a single team playmaker. Willie Tonga adds some much needed class to the centres though his wingers won't see the ball. The Eels haven't lost much over the offseason but they have again failed to recognise their own needs and it is again going to leave the Eels struggling near the bottom of the ladder.

Representative Losses: (Likely) Jarryd Hayne, Fuifui Moimoi, Willie Tonga. (Possible) Tim Mannah.

Position Ratings:

Fullback ----- 8

For all Jarryd Hayne's individual brilliance, his inability to fit into a structure at Parramatta combined with his wont to drift off means he cannot be considered one of the elite custodians in the NRL. Hayne is an elite returner, a pure tryscorer and a player who can create his own opportunities but he rarely plays to his best and does little to make the team better. Luke Burt will play fullback if Hayne is again tried at five-eighth.

Three Quarters ----- 5.5

The best thing that can be said about the Parramatta three-quarter line is that it isn't nearly as bad as last year, when the likes of Paul Whatuira, Chris Hicks and Chris Walker were all brought back from overseas in what proved an unmitigated disaster. This year the recruits – Willie and Esi Tonga – are at least under the age of 30 and have been playing in the NRL. Willie Tonga is the incumbent Australian and Queensland centre so there is no questioning his class though his form tapered last year and he is a selfish player. He also struggled off the field when last in Sydney. Esi Tonga has been highlighted as a player with a big future but he is a major liability defensively and struggled last year on the comeback from a knee injury. At this stage he can only be considered a below average starter. Winger Luke Burt is a smart player with plenty of skill but is wasted on the wing, where he is only a fair player. Trying him in the halves would be well worthwhile. Ryan Morgan looks a decent player. Eni Folau, Cheyse Blair and Ken Sio are unlikely to be big contributors in 2012. Speed, defensive capabilities and try scoring are all issues with the Parramatta outside backs.

Five-Eighth ----- 2.5

Regular readers of Making The Nut are well aware of the disdain I hold the play of Ben Roberts in. At Canterbury he was such a poor player that he could not usurp Kris Keating for the job for most of 2011. A player with almost no intelligence, rarely has he demonstrated even a modicum of poise. He can kick and he can run but he has little playmaking ability and his moronic decision-making nearly always cripples teams. One good game against Brisbane five years ago doesn't a player make. A certain downgrade, even on Daniel Mortimer.

Halfback ----- 6.5

Parramatta have attempted to solve their halfback concerns by throwing huge money at unproven ex-South Sydney No.7 Chris Sandow. The decision could go either way. Sandow improved significantly in 2011 with his most considerable progress coming in his kicking game. Still, he struggles to play within a structure and he reportedly has significant off-field problems, reportedly missing for a number of days before a critical late-season game last year. He has no safety blanket at five-eighth or fullback and will be playing behind an ordinary pack under a coach not known for developing backs. The Eels have a half with upside but like so many who have worn the jersey since Peter Sterling, it would come as no shock if it all went pear-shaped.

Hooker ----- 4

For reasons known only to the Paul Osborne regime, Parramatta's best hooker Anthony Mitchell was sent to the Sydney Roosters mid-season, meaning Matt Keating and Casey McGuire will again share the hooking duties. Keating is one of the least effective hookers in the game, a modest defender and a non-entity in attack. McGuire played reasonably well in his return season and was good around dummy half without being a game-changer. There is constant bleating about Parramatta's halfback woes but the club has not had a decent hooker since Steve Edge retired in 1984.

Prop ----- 8

Parramatta's prop rotation is one of the few bright spots in a team littered with disappointments. Fuihui Moimoi led all props in metres made in 2011 and was a real handful when he launched himself like a teenage tart into the attack. He was nicely complemented by Tim Mannah, who is just 24 but has 73 games and two seasons of Origin football in experience. His numbers are outstanding and his fitness improved significantly last year. He has all the tools expected of a first-class prop. Mannah will no doubt be inspired by the signing of his brother Jon, recently recovered from a bout of cancer. His brother will fight for a bench spot with Justin Poore, Shane Shackleton and Mitchell Allgood. Justin Poore has been an incredible disappointment since signing with the Eels, playing only four games in 2011, getting on the park at the backend of the season. He may never rediscover his best. Shane Shackleton had a full season in 2011 but struggled with his production. Mitchell Allgood's numbers weren't overly enthralling in his debut season but he looks to be a handy proposition who will get plenty of time in first grade.

Backrow ----- 6

Nathan Hindmarsh turned 32 last year and played on an ordinary team but his main skill did not diminish, the gallant backrower leading the NRL tackle count with nearly 50 a game. Combined with nearly 95 metres a match, Hindmarsh showed why he is such a revered player. He doesn't have a lot of support in the backrow though. Reni Maitua looked dangerous when returning from a drugs ban, particularly running the ball. He was difficult to put down and showed the kind of creativity the Eels need from their pack. Justin Horo has a great attitude and is very dangerous when let

loose. He is a player the Eels can build around in the future. It is unclear what Ben Smith actually brings to the table. He isn't an overly strong runner or a heavy worker despite being touted as the heir apparent to Hindmarsh as captain. Taniela Lasalo took up the role of solid defender but he looks no better than an average player. The Eels need Maitua and Horo to step up as dynamic players if the backrow is to contribute meaningfully to winning games.

Blue Chip Players: 4- Jarryd Hayne (fullback), Willie Tonga (centre), Nathan Hindmarsh (backrow) Fuifui Moimoi (prop)

Coach Rating: Stephen Kearney (2nd season at Parramatta, 2nd in the NRL) ----- **5**

Coach History:

W-L Record: 6-17-1
 Finals Record: 0-0
 Finals Seasons: 0
 Premierships: 0
 Club Record: 6-17-1

Coach Analysis: Stephen Kearney's first season in charge of Parramatta was a disaster with the club only avoiding the wooden spoon with a last round victory over the Gold Coast. Kearney joined the Eels with an impressive resume that included coaching New Zealand to the 2008 World Cup and the 2010 Four Nations and five years as an assistant to Melbourne coach Craig Bellamy but the instability at the club meant he was immediately under pressure. Kearney certainly isn't as bad as his first season suggested as he was forced to coach the worst recruiting class ever assembled, one which he had very little to do with assembling. The Eels have been a mess in recent times, on and off the field. But Kearney must assume responsibility for being unable to get Jarryd Hayne to play consistently, for failing to stick with a halves combination and for failing to regularly get committed performances from his team. This year it is all on him after he rubber stamped the signings of Chris Sandow, Willie Tonga and Ben Roberts. Kearney will likely see out his three-year deal with the Eels but he needs to get the Eels playing reasonably competitively if he wants to make sure of that.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	6-17-1	14th	3-5	2-5-1	1-7	DNQ	--	
2010	10-14	12th	4-4	3-5	3-5	DNQ	--	
2009	12-11-1	8th	3-5	2-5-1	7-1	3-1	Grand Final	
2008	11-13	11th	4-4	3-5	4-4	DNQ	--	
2007	13-11	5th	4-4	5-3	4-4	2-1	Preliminary Final	

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	6-17-1	14th		3-5	2-5-1	1-7	DNQ	--

Draw Analysis: Parramatta are a horrible starting team and have not gone into their 17th game better than 7-9 in the last four years. Only once in that period have they made the finals and that was on the back of a huge 7-1 finish. With six finalists in the first eight weeks, it is hard to see that slow-start tendency changing. The one upside for Parramatta early is five home games in their first eight with only one interstate journey. Byes for the Eels come in rounds 11 and 14 meaning round 17 is when they will be without their Origin stars. That match is against Newcastle. That starts a tough six-match streak for the Eels who face Manly, Canterbury, Melbourne, Brisbane and the Tigers after. A relatively easy final four may be too little, too late for the Eels, who suffer from a brutal opening and a fairly tough period around the end of Origin.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	6-17-1	4-7-1	2-10
2010	10-14	5-7	5-7
2009	15-12-1	7-4-1	8-8
2008	11-13	7-5	4-8
2007	15-12	8-4	7-8
Five-Year Total	57-68-2	31-27-2	26-41

Home and Away Analysis: Parramatta fell from a team that had been nothing but average over the last half-decade to one that ranked among the worst in the NRL. One of the prime reasons was a horrid away record, winning only 2 of 12 on the road, taking their five-year road record to 38.8%. The Eels have also recorded back-to-back losing seasons at home. The Eels have no home ground advantage.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	15th	15th	13th	8th	6th
Metres	3rd	9th	2nd	10th	4th
Offloads	16th	1st	1st	4th	5th
Tackle Breaks	16th	16th	2nd	11th	4th
Errors	5th	15th	7th	6th	6th

Defence Rankings:

Category	2012	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	12th	3rd	4th	9th	6th
Metres Conceded	14th	16th	11th	14th	8th
Missed Tackles	8th	3rd	5th	2nd	3rd

Attack-Defence Ranking Analysis: In the last edition of this guide, I wrote: "The deal with Parramatta's attack is this: since Brian Smith left, the Eels have consistently been at the top of offload rankings including first-placed rankings the last two seasons. Yet they cannot seem to score points. In 2009 and 2010, the Daniel Anderson years, they led the NRL in offloads yet finished 13th and 15th in points scored." Under Stephen Kearney, the attack only got worse. Offloads were out, the Eels falling from first to last in the category. But points were still very hard to come by with Parra ranking 15th in points scored. The Eels also finished last in tackle breaks for the second straight season, a result of lacking a dynamic player. The addition of Willie Tonga should see this improved. Better handling was one area Kearney could hang his hat on but such improvement only further highlights how insipid the Parramatta attack was, a damning assessment particularly on Jarryd Hayne, supposedly one of the top offensive players in the code. The Eels have blown up their attack with a new halves pairing so at least the club realises how ineffective and impotent same has been. Surprisingly, considering Kearney was an apostle of Craig Bellamy, the defence regressed noticeably. After ranking top-five in points conceded and missed tackles under Daniel Anderson, the Eels fell to 12th in points conceded and eighth in missed tackles. If the defence continues on the same trajectory then Kearney could be looking for a new job in 2013.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	Luke Burt	10
2010	Jarryd Hayne, Krisnan Inu	11
2009	Luke Burt	15
2008	Joel Reddy	12
2007	Jarryd Hayne, Krisnan Inu	12

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 37 (2nd) 2011 Key Position: 19 (12th)
2010: 43 (5th)

Games Lost Analysis: The Eels again had a charmed run with injury with rookie winger Ryan Morgan's 10-game absence due to ankle and hamstring problems their worst sustained absence. Halfback/hooker Jeff Robson missed eight games with a

knee injury while Casey McGuire and Jarryd Hayne both missed three games, the latter due to Origin and suspension. Parramatta had few health-related excuses in 2011 though were hurt in the key positions.

2011 Betting Analysis: Parramatta were a losing proposition for bettors for the second straight season, going 11-13 ATS, taking their record to 19-29 ATS in the last two years and again losing as a head-to-head wager both home and away with their -\$9.87 return the worst in the NRL. It is the second straight year, the Eels have finished bottom-two in head-to-head return with the Eels, a very public team, again overrated by the market. The worst bet in rugby league over the last two seasons has been Parramatta as a favourite. After going 3-13 ATS when favoured in 2010, the Eels went 1-5 ATS when in the red in 2011. The 4-18 ATS record when the popular elect (3-12 ATS as a home pick) is abysmal while the 0-11 ATS record over the last two seasons when favoured by less than a converted try is just unbelievably poor. One situation the Eels have been backable in has been as a home underdog. The Eels went 5-2 ATS as a home underdog last year and are 7-2 ATS in the situation over the last two years. The short backup was again a worry with the Eels 2-3 ATS on a five-day break taking their record to 3-8 ATS over the last two years. In wet weather, Parra are 3-8 ATS over the last two years. The Eels were a 12-12 over-under team whose only notable tendency was a 6-0 under in wet weather. Parramatta are a public team who sharp punters would do well to back against more often than not.

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$19.00

Minor Premiership: \$26.00

Top 4: \$4.25

Top 8: \$2.25

The Bookmaker: "Chris Sandow and Jarryd Hayne together ... wow. This has the potential to be the most exciting on-field combo of 2012. However, I think Paul Pottinger has more chance of being elected chairman of the Independent Commission than the Eels have of claiming the 2012 premiership."

-Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

Mr Rugby Assessment: Parra are probably the exact opposite to the Bulldogs. Home to a few out-and-out matchwinners but perhaps lacking that structure, attitude and reliability that a coach like Des Hasler can bring. Maybe I'm being tough on Stephen Kearney but if he can get some momentum going, the Eels will be a massive runner. Price: \$17.00

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 45.5 (15th)

Weighted Roster Rating: 55.9 (16th)

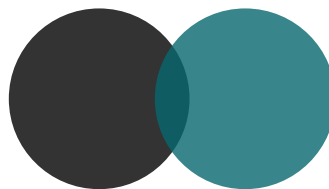
Predicted Finishing Range: 11th-16th

Predicted Finish: 16th

There is some speculation that the Eels may be on the up this season but it is hard to see why those judges would believe same. If anything, Parramatta are likely to be a more streaky and even less consistent team. The recruitment of Chris Sandow was certainly a positive but he is being severely overrated. He had a good 2011 but was ordinary beforehand and is a solo artist not the conductor of an orchestra, not the kind of halfback the Eels need. Combine him with Ben Roberts and the club is just courting disaster. Not that we should be surprised. The Eels' front office is the worst in the NRL with self-interest, petty politicking and revenge the main games at the club. Stephen Kearney has done little to change the club's culture as it was thought he would. Jarryd Hayne is again the star but the pressure is on him to find a role in helping those around him rather than just himself. It defies belief that a team with a player often mentioned as being the best attacking player in the game is so poor in attack. Kearney must spend the offseason giving the Eels an identity and an idea in attack or Parramatta are in for another long year. The front row is strong and the backrow has upside but the hooking role is probably Parramatta's biggest hole and in the modern game you just can't afford the luxury of a hooker who can't create. It will be more of the same at Parramatta in 2012. The more they change there, the more they stay the same. It is a rotten culture and combined with a team of individuals, a bottom-four finish seems to be well on the cards for the blue-and-golds.

2012 Betting Advice: Parramatta are a public team and public teams are best laid as they are oversubscribed and under the odds. The Eels left punters in need of long-term psychiatric help with a horrible performance as both a straight-up proposition and a line play in 2010 and they weren't much better in 2011. As a favourite they have been a total disaster with their only real playable situation coming as a home underdog. Anyone who plays them as a favourite is moronic and anyone taking a small minus about them is asking for life as a vagabond. The one total situation that seems reasonably strong is the under in total points betting. The one futures bet worth taking is the Eels for the spoon at \$15 with Flemington Sportsbet, a sensational play. Also look to back them at better than \$1.50 to miss the eight (\$1.75 is available at Sportingbet). The Eels are in for a long year and the market again doesn't seem to want to recognise how bad the side is.

PENRITH PANTHERS



Strongest Team

1. Michael Gordon (fb/w/c)
2. Ryan Walker (w)
3. Michael Jennings (c)
4. Brad Tighe (w/c),
5. Geoff Daniela (w/c)
6. Lachlan Coote (fb/fe)
7. Luke Walsh (hb)
13. Luke Lewis (br/fe/hb/c/w)
12. Cameron Ciraldo (br/p)
11. Nathan Smith (br)
10. Sam McKendry (p)
9. Kevin Kingston (h)
8. Tim Grant (p)

-
14. Nigel Plum (br)
 15. Travis Burns (fe)
 16. Clint Newton (br)
 17. Chris Armit (p)

Others: Yileen Gordon (br/c), Sandor Earl (w), Masada Iosefa (h), David Simmons (w/fb/c), Nafe Seluini (h), Blake Austin (br), Sarafu Fatiaki (br), Harry Seijka (fe), Junior Vaivai (c), Dayne Weston (p/br), Danny Galea (br/c), Junio Tia-Kilifi (w), Etu Uaisele (w/c), Ryan Simpkins (br)

Gains: Cameron Ciraldo (Newcastle), Clint Newton (Hull KR), Chris Armit (Canterbury), Geoff Daniela (Wests Tigers), Danny Galea (Canberra), Junior Tia-Kilifi (Canterbury), Ryan Simpkins (Gold Coast), Etu Uaisele (Parramatta)

Losses: Petero Civoniceva (Brisbane), Trent Waterhouse (Warrington), Timana Tahu (Newcastle), Matthew Bell (Wests Tigers), Adrian Purtell (Bradford), Shane Elford (Retired), Daine Laurie (Released), Joseph Paulo (Parramatta)

Net Recruitment Assessment: Ivan Cleary arrives at Penrith as a highly respected coach but he has his work cut out for him with the Panthers coming out big losers in the offseason horse-trading. The Panthers lost skipper Petero Civoniceva and international backrower Trent Waterhouse, along with former international centre Timana Tahu, and replaced them with a string of fringe first graders, kids with limited promise and honest toilers. The Panthers needed a class forward and didn't come close to landing one. On recruitment alone, the Panthers look a major net loser and a bottom-four team.

Representative Losses: (Likely) Luke Lewis, Sam McKendry. (Possible) Michael Jennings, Michael Gordon.

Position Ratings:

Fullback ----- 8

Ivan Cleary has a very difficult decision to make as to who he plays at fullback; incumbent Lachlan Coote or the effervescent Michael Gordon. Coote has shown plenty of ability at the back but is injury prone and he does have the skill-set to play five-eighth. Indications are that Gordon will be given first crack. Gordon has been absolutely scintillating when given an opportunity at fullback, scoring tries and setting them up and proving to have an exceptional kick return. The smart move will be to go with Gordon, one of the best and most underrated outside backs in the game.

Three Quarters ----- 6.5

There is no questioning the class of Penrith's Australian centre Michael Jennings but after an extraordinarily disappointing 2011, scoring only one try in 15 appearances amid speculation that he was unfocussed at training and had major attitude problems, the pressure is on. At one stage he was suspended for attending training drunk while there was talk he was on the verge of being given a vote of no confidence by senior players. He is blessed with wonderful speed and a ton of talent but 2012 has him at the crossroads where he is going to need to bounce back strongly. He does not have much talent around him in the three-quarter line. Brad Tighe is honest enough. Geoff Daniela has not been able to cement a regular first grade spot. Ryan Walker and Sandor Earl, two pacey types, will battle for a spot on the wing if Michael Gordon is named at fullback. Neither elicits much confidence, particularly Earl, who is a soft player. David Simmons is also in the mix.

Five-Eighth ----- 6

Ivan Cleary has a number of options at five-eighth, which will primarily be dictated by his decision at fullback. The smart move would be to put the talented Lachlan Coote into the No.6 jersey. Coote has done well at fullback but he looks to have the skills of a running half, similar to Manly's Kieran Foran. Getting worked over defensively is a worry but Coote did play in the frontline as a youngster. Travis Burns played five-eighth last year but he is such a defence-oriented player that does little to spark the Penrith backline that he is not a viable option. Harry Seijka played well in two games and is well in the mix.

Halfback ----- 6

Luke Walsh is what he is. He is a good kick, a reliable passer and a decent enough on-field general but he is no threat on the run and he rarely asks defences too many questions. He is not a player who will win the Panthers a game but he won't lose too many for them either.

Hooker ----- 6.5

Kevin Kingston was one of the most disappointing players of 2011. After a fine 2010 where his dummy half running was critical to Penrith's finals run, Kingston was much less penetrating in 2011 and it was reflected in Penrith's mostly flaccid and predictable attack. He is capable of playing at a high level but consistency is his major problem. Nafe Seluini is a livewire who has won the backup spot. Masada Iosefa is decent but will see more backrow action in 2012.

Prop ----- 6

The loss of Petero Civoniceva has left the Panthers short on both class and depth at prop. The starters will be Sam McKendry and Tim Grant. McKendry won't turn 23 until July but already has six Tests to his name and already looks a good impact forward with ball-playing tendencies. Grant's a big bopper with a huge heart whose numbers really stack up. He bends opposition lines and tries hard in defence and is now the leader of the pack. The rotation falls away after the starters though. Chris Armit has signed on but is a fringe first grader at best. Clint Newton is a risk returning from England. Cameron Ciraldo is more a backrower. Dayne Weston and Danny Galea will get some minutes but none of the bench players rate better than mediocre.

Backrow ----- 6

Luke Lewis is one of the top players in the game and certainly in the top handful of all-time Panthers with Alexander, Simmons, Gower and Sheens. At 28, he is still in his peak and remains a wonderful balance of brute force and deft creativity. Lewis is a rare player with all the skills and is at his best at lock, where he has a licence to roam. His biggest strength, arguably, is his ability to escape tackles, creating plenty of second-phase play for Penrith. A genuine star. He has little support in the backrow though now Trent Waterhouse has gone. Nathan Smith, Cameron Ciraldo, Nigel Plum, Clint Newton and Buddy Gordon will probably fight for the remaining starting positions. Ciraldo is a nice buy, an honest worker. Plum can hit. Smith was quiet in 2011. Newton returns, reportedly, a new player after his Super League stint. Gordon doesn't bring much. It is really a diamond in the dust in the Panthers' backrow this year.

Blue Chip Players: 3- Michael Gordon (wing), Michael Jennings (centre), Luke Lewis (backrow)

Coach Rating: Ivan Cleary (1st season at the Penrith, 7th in the NRL) ----- 7.5

Coach History:

W-L Record: 77-74-3
Finals Record: 4-6
Finals Seasons: 4
Premierships: 0
Club Record: 0-0

Coach Analysis: If Phil Gould does nothing else for Penrith as general manager, he has lured Ivan Cleary from New Zealand. Cleary is an outstanding coach and perhaps the next breakout mentor. Perennially underrated, Cleary did a marvellous job with the Warriors, leading them to a 12-12 or better record in five of his six seasons in Auckland with his only failure coming in 2009, the year Sonny Fai tragically died. That culminated in a shock Grand Final appearance last year after he had already announced his intention to move to Penrith in 2012, a tremendous effort from a coach who has never got his dues. The Panthers are currently in the throes of a rebuilding effort so it will take a while for Cleary to really make an impact but he is the right man for the job. He is a wonderful developer of talent and his even temperament and strict attitude is perfect for a young team.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	9-15	12th	2-6	5-3	2-6	DNQ	--	
2010	15-9	2nd	5-3	6-2	4-4	0-2	Semi Final	
2009	11-12-1	11th	4-4	4-4	3-4-1	DNQ	--	
2008	10-13-1	12th	4-4	3-4-1	3-5	DNQ	--	
2007	8-16	16th	2-6	2-6	4-4	DNQ	--	

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	14-10	6th	4-4	4-4	6-2	3-1	Grand Final	
2010	14-10	5th	3-5	6-2	5-3	0-1	Qualifying Final	
2009	7-15-2	14th	3-4-1	2-6	2-5-1	DNQ	--	
2008	13-11	8th	4-4	3-5	6-2	2-1	Preliminary Final	
2007	13-10-1	4th	4-4	3-5	6-1-1	0-2	Semi Final	

Draw Analysis: 2010 was the first time in five years that Penrith left one of the sectors with a better than 4-4 record. They did it twice, opening the year 5-3 and then going 6-2 throughout the middle of the season. They followed that up with a 5-3 middle in 2011. Aside from Penrith's inability to break out, they rarely lay an egg either. They are not typically fast or slow starters or finishers. Like last year, their season will be decided early with five winnable games against five non-finalists to open up the year. It then gets heavy for the Panthers with eight games against eight finalists including three against last year's Grand Finalists in rounds 6, 12 and 14. Penrith's byes come in round 13 and 18. They cop the Cowboys, Warriors and Souths before the three Origin matches and come up net winners in the first and third but likely losers against the Warriors. Their run home is fair with four home games and four finalists. If the Panthers aren't riding high after five weeks, they're long odds to be playing finals football.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	9-15	6-6	3-9
2010	15-11	9-4	6-7
2009	11-12-1	7-4-1	4-8
2008	10-13-1	4-7-1	6-6
2007	8-16	3-9	5-7
Five-Year Total	53-67-2	29-30-2	24-37

Home and Away Analysis: Penrith have at least made amends for having committed the first sin of any football club: losing at home. Over 2007 and 2008, the Panthers were an unforgivable 7-16-1 at Penrith Park while a decent 11-13 on the road. Penrith bumped their home win total to seven games in 2009 and nine games in 2010 before dropping back to a 6-6 record in 2011. While Penrith Park is far from feared by opposition teams, Penrith are at least gaining some respectability at home, their record now 29-30-2. Penrith have not had a winning season on the road over the last five years.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	11th	1st	9th	7th	8th
Metres	7th	7th	8th	11th	7th
Offloads	1st	7th	4th	12th	10th
Tackle Breaks	14th	15th	10th	8th	10th
Errors	14th	5th	14th	14th	15th-

Defence Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	11th	9th	15th	13th	13th
Metres Conceded	2nd	1st	2nd	8th	2nd
Missed Tackles	10th	8th	12th	10th	7th

Attack-Defence Rankings Analysis: Penrith regressed to their traditional selves in 2011 after a huge attacking improvement saw them play two finals in 2010. The one-dimensional Panthers attack (kick high and send multiple chasers) was stymied late in 2010 and the result was a drop in points scored from first to 11th. There were two other major factors related to this: long-term injuries to key attacking personnel Michael Gordon, Michael Jennings and Lachlan Coote and terrible handling, which saw the club drop from fifth to 14th in errors. Poor handling has habitually been a

concern and as with the Warriors, discipline is a major problem that Ivan Cleary will have to address. Not a lot changed defensively with the Panthers remaining a mediocre unit. Penrith have the tools to improve their attack but it could take a number of years to change the culture to embrace the defensive aspect of the game.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	Lachlan Coote, David Simmons	10
2010	Lachlan Coote	17
2009	Michael Jennings	17
2008	Michael Jennings	12
2007	Michael Jennings	15

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 59 (8th) 2011 Key Position: 17 (9th)
 2010: 54 (6th)

Games Lost Analysis: Michael Gordon's absence for the final 15 games of the season was a crushing blow to the Panthers, who lost their outstanding outside back and goalkicker to a ruptured ACL. Fellow representative outside back Michael Jennings also missed nine games through injury/Origin/suspension and Lachlan Coote was absent for nine matches, severely denting Penrith's try-scoring punch. The club's best player, Luke Lewis, missed 10 games due to a lingering shoulder injury. The Panthers lost arguably four of their five best players for extended periods in 2011 and rarely fielded their strongest team.

2011 Betting Analysis: Penrith went 13-11 ATS in 2011, a marginal improvement from their 13-13 ATS mark in 2010. The best situation to play the Panthers was as road underdogs, where they went 7-4 ATS and 11-8 ATS over the last two years. As a home favourite, Penrith have gone 11-7 ATS over the last two seasons. At night, the Panthers were 11-6 ATS and 20-16 ATS dating back two years. Two outstanding situations to play Penrith are off a five-day backup and off a bye where Penrith are 7-0 ATS and 4-0 ATS respectively. A 3-9 road record saw them post the third worst head-to-head road betting record, losing \$5.25. Total points saw the Panthers go 11-13 under, a notable regression from being 16-10 over in 2010 with their total number of 61-plus point games falling from eight to zero. On the road Penrith were 8-4 under while they were 5-1 over as a home favourite, going 12-6 over as the home chalk since 2010. The Panthers were again an over side in day games, going 5-2 over again to be 10-4 over the last two years in the sunlight.

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$21.00

Minor Premiership: \$41.00

Top 4: \$5.50

Top 8: \$3.00

The Bookmaker: "Can only improve under new coach Ivan Cleary and general manager Phil Gould but Petero Civoniceva and Trent Waterhouse are big losses. Will Michael Jennings stand up and be counted at club level this year after a disappointing 2011?"

-Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

Mr Rugby Assessment: Say what you want about Gus Gould but he is a proven winner. With Ivan Cleary also on board I expect this underperforming club to make some inroads in 2012. At their current quote I feel they are overs. Price: \$24.00

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 52.5 (10th)

Weighted Roster Rating: 66 (10th)

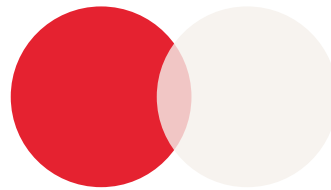
Predicted Finishing Range: 9th-16th

Predicted Finish: 13th

The trigger was finally pulled. After seven seasons that have netted one finals appearance, not a single finals win and a wooden spoon, changes needed to be made. Phil Gould was hired to oversee the rebuild with Ivan Cleary appointed by Gould to take the reins of re-establishing the club at the top of the premiership ladder. It is a long-term project and Gould, Cleary, the Penrith board and the Panthers' faithful are not expecting miracles this year. It could, considering the net recruitment loss, get worse before it gets better as Gould and Cleary attempt to clean the slate. They have some wonderful players like Luke Lewis, Michael Gordon and Michael Jennings but the squad lacks class and depth and won't be contending in 2012. It is more important that young players are blooded and recruitment is astute and that the culture of a weak-willed club is changed. The Panthers should be back in business soon. Both Phil Gould and Ivan Cleary know only of finals. But the club is in an almighty hole and is going to have to endure a season or two of hurt before they're back on top.

2012 Betting Advice: Penrith should be long odds to make the top eight this year. This is a major rebuilding year and though they have hired a very good coach, but it is hard to see Penrith worrying the big dogs of the NRL in 2012. With a nice draw early on, Penrith are some hope of jumping with the pack so those looking to get on the very good play of missing the eight may get close to evens. There aren't many situations to play Penrith week-to-week though they are perfect off a bye and off a short break the last two years. As a home favourite, look to play the over but it is wise to be wary of an ordinary road team when they're travelling. The presence of Michael Jennings may make Michael Gordon backable in leading try scorer betting when odds come out. Take \$2.50.

ST GEORGE-ILLAWARRA DRAGONS



Strongest Team

1. Kyle Stanley (fe/hb/c/w/br)
2. Brett Morris (w)
3. Chase Stanley (c/fe/br/w)
4. Matt Cooper (c)
5. Jason Nightingale (w/fb)
6. Jamie Soward (fe/hb)
7. Ben Hornby (hb/fb)
13. Dean Young (br/h)
12. Ben Creagh (br)
11. Beau Scott (br)
10. Dan Hunt (p)
9. Nathan Fien (h/hb/fe)
8. Michael Weyman (p)

-
14. Matt Prior (br/p/c)
 15. Trent Merrin (p)
 16. Josh Miller (p/br)
 17. Mitch Rein (h)

Others: Jeremy Latimore (p), Daniel Vidot (w), Will Matthews (br), Atelea Vea (br/p), Leeson Ah Mau (p/br), David Gower (br), Cameron King (h), Nick Emmett (br/c/w), Jake Marketo (br), Bronx Goodwin (fb/w), Jack De Belin (br), Denan Kemp (w), Evander Cummins (fb), Nathan Green (c), Jack Stockwell (p)

Gains: Chase Stanley (Melbourne), Josh Miller (Canberra), Jeremy Latimore (New Zealand), Will Matthews (Gold Coast), Atelea Vea (Melbourne), Daniel Vidot (Canberra), Leeson Ah Mau (North Queensland), Denan Kemp (Rugby union)

Losses: Darius Boyd (Newcastle), Mark Gasnier (Retired), Alex McKinnon (Newcastle), Jack Bosden (Sydney Roosters), Jon Green (Cronulla), Peni Tagive (Sydney Roosters), Adam Cuthbertson (Newcastle), Daniel Penese (Parramatta), Michael Greenfield (Melbourne), Reece Simmonds (Retired)

Net Recruitment Assessment: The Wayne Bennett era has officially ended and he has taken with him star fullback Darius Boyd, promising young centre Alex McKinnon and Adam Cuthbertson. International centre Mark Gasnier has also retired while forwards Jack Bosden, Jon Green and Michael Greenfield have all moved on. With the Dragons top heavy in their salary cap, the club could not afford to invest in a big name replacement for Boyd and will rely on either Kyle Stanley or Jason Nightingale making a successful switch to the custodian role after Tim Moltzen reneged on his move to Wollongong. What the Dragons would not have banked on,

however, was losing kids like McKinnon and Bosden, viewed as the future of the club. As such, depth is going to be a major worry for new coach Steve Price. The starting 13 remains top notch but the team falls away quickly after that. The likes of Josh Miller, Chase Stanley and Jeremy Latimore should all contribute but what the club was thinking with Daniel Vidot or Leeson Ah Mau is unclear as both are ordinary.

Representative Losses: (Likely) Brett Morris, Beau Scott, Jamie Soward, Jason Nightingale. (Possible) Ben Creagh, Dean Young, Michael Weyman

Position Ratings:

Fullback -----5.5

The Dragons have an open contest for the fullback position this season following the exit of Darius Boyd. The No.1 jersey will go to either rising star Kyle Stanley or reliable winger Jason Nightingale. Stanley is the favourite for the job, or at least should be. Stanley has a ton of potential with blinding speed, a mature head and a keenness for the ball. He has done very well in limited time and in an array of positions and has earned his chance to win a regular first grade spot. Should he prove vulnerable under the high ball, however, Nightingale will be moved to custodian. Nightingale is solid enough and an excellent winger but can't match Stanley's promise as a playmaker.

Three Quarters ----- 9

Despite losing Mark Gasnier to retirement, the Dragons still have arguably one of the best three-quarter lines in the NRL. Both wingers are of an international quality. Brett Morris' form slipped last year, scoring only 10 tries, but he has crossed for 55 in his last 70 matches. Jason Nightingale is the consummate professional and while not the tryscoring threat that Morris is, he is more reliable in defence and is always about rucking from his own line. Matt Cooper turned 32 early last season but still crossed the line 14 times, his highest tally since 2006. He remains one of the best defensive centres in the code and is still dangerous down the left with good footwork and enough speed. Chase Stanley will replace Gasnier if he is fit. Stanley has managed only 16 games over the last three seasons after suffering serious knee, shoulder and elbow injuries. He is such a nice type that he played international football at 18 but he needs to prove he can handle the rigours of NRL football. If Stanley can't go, Daniel Vidot will probably be first up. He is a shocking defender with poor hands who will be found out if tried in the centres. The Dragons will need to find a strong junior to cover for injury but their projected starters are top-notch.

Five-Eighth ----- 8

Jamie Soward finally got his just reward last year, playing all three Origins and establishing himself as one of the top five-eighths in the game. Over the first two-thirds of the season, Soward was excellent, particularly when he started running. His form fell off a cliff in the backend of the year though and it told in the Dragons' end-of-year collapse. Admittedly, Soward was taking the field hurt but there are also

question marks over his willingness going forward, particularly without his great confidence provider, Wayne Bennett. Soward has the ability to be one of the top five-eighths in the game but 2012 will be a pivotal season for the skilled playmaker.

Halfback ----- 5.5

Here is the statistic that may see Dragons skipper Ben Hornby moved out of the halves and perhaps out of the NRL by year's end: in 21 games in 2011, Hornby recorded only two try assists. That number simply isn't acceptable for a starting first grade halfback, even for a second-string playmaker as Hornby obviously is. At 32, his time as an NRL half is dramatically coming to a close. While he is a safe choice, he offers little in attack, a major worry for the Dragons at the backend of last year. He will have limited opportunities before one of the Stanley boys is tried or Nathan Fien makes a permanent move to the No.7 jersey.

Hooker ----- 7.5

The Dragons are flush with hookers this year with starter Nathan Fien and utility Dean Young likely to share the role while rising stars Mitch Rein (15 games) and Cameron King (1 game) will push for positions. Fien is an international who is a good attacking player and reliable defender while Young, a more able defender, struggles with his dummy half passing. King is a former Australian schoolboys skipper while Rein looked a real prospect when given time last year.

Prop ----- 8

The Dragons have a touch of class in their front row. Michael Weyman played Origin in 2010 and while his form did not reach such heights in 2011, he was solid enough. He is certainly a better player than he was at the Raiders, who can make plenty of yardage when fit and healthy. Young gun Trent Merrin is fixing to become one of the most productive bookends in the NRL. Merrin played in two Origin matches last season while recording 25/115 numbers. He is a real hustler who will improve with age. Big things are expected. Dan Hunt doesn't get the credit he deserves. There is little flash or pizzazz about the big man but he always makes his metres and his tackles and is there doing the unfashionable stuff. Jeremy Latimore and Josh Miller have been signed to provide depth up front. Latimore was solid enough for the Warriors but Miller is the sneaky buy who will provide plenty for the Red V. He is versatile, hard working and loves the grease and the grime. He is going to provide plenty to the Dragons' pack. If injuries hit, Matt Prior will play some prop. He is on the small side but he makes up for it in heart and a love for tackling.

Backrow ----- 8

Despite the fact most of the Dragons backrow looks identical, all perform very different roles and all do them well. Ben Creagh is among the best fringe runners in the NRL while Beau Scott is one of the game's hardest hitters. Creagh totalled nearly 100 offloads/tackle breaks in 2011 and Scott is as reliable as any player in the game. The versatile Matt Prior is a hard-worker in the Scott mould but offers more punch with his run. Dean Young continues to be underrated but his work-rate, leadership

and deft skill have been critical to the Dragons' recent success and his Origin call-up was deserved. Well-bred Cootamundra product Jack De Belin is the one on the rise who can make some waves in first grade, particularly during Origin time.

Blue Chip Players: 5- Jason Nightingale (wing), Brett Morris (wing), Matt Cooper (centre), Jamie Soward (five-eighth), Ben Creagh (backrow)

Coach Rating: Steve Price (1st season at the Dragons, 1st in the NRL) ----- 5

Coach History:

W-L Record: 0-0

Finals Record: 0-0

Finals Seasons: 0

Premierships: 0

Club Record: 0-0

Coach Analysis: At 34 years of age, Steve Price becomes St-George-Illawarra's second young coach of their last three. The former pivot, who played 12 games for St George and Balmain in the late 1990s (playing under David Waite and Wayne Pearce) before injury cut his playing career short, has spent most of his coaching career at the Dragons. At 25 he became a Jersey Flegg assistant before taking the helm at 27, guiding them to a premiership in 2005. From 2006-09, Price was the club's Premier League and then Toyota Cup coach, the Dragons making the preliminary final in each year Price was the Toyota Cup boss. He became first grade assistant in 2010, where he played a key role in the premiership success and was handed the reins for 2012 after receiving the blessing of mastercoach Wayne Bennett, the Dragons not officially interviewing other candidates. Such was the faith Bennett had in Price that he allowed his assistant to take full control of the team during the World Club Challenge in February 2011 – a match won 21-15 by the Dragons. There is no questioning the quality of Price's resume and his references cannot be topped. He also has the added benefit of inheriting Wayne Bennett's system from the start. The challenge will come in Price's ability to assert his authority at such a tender age - a problem that undermined Nathan Brown's rein at the club – as well as making the necessary adjustments in attack to cater for the loss of Darius Boyd. The Dragons are at the crossroads. Price should be a quality first-year coach but if the pre-Bennett culture re-emerges at the club then the debutant will need to really stamp his authority early. His lack of outside coaching also poses some concern.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	14-9-1	5th	7-1	4-3-1	3-5	0-2	Semi Final	
2010	17-7	1st	7-1	5-3	5-3	3-0	Premiers	
2009	17-7	1st	6-2	6-2	5-3	0-2	Semi Final	
2008	13-11	7th	2-6	7-1	4-4	0-1	Qualifying Final	
2007	9-15	13th	2-6	4-4	3-5	DNQ	--	

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
--Debut Season--								

Draw Analysis: The one truism of the Dragons over the last five years is that the team was a dreadful starter until Wayne Bennett arrived, when the club transformed into one of the quickest to jump in the NRL. It is unclear if they will be so quick out of the box under Steve Price. The Dragons get a fair but not overly easy start to the season, highlighted by two clashes against former coach Wayne Bennett in rounds one and seven. A tough run against the Tigers, Manly and Brisbane from rounds three to five will be a fair indicator of where the Dragons are at. Byes come in rounds 14 and 18, leaving the Red V short against Souths in round 11 and bogey-team Canberra in round 17. Most of the Dragons' hard games in the final third of the season come at home so there will be no excuses about a hard draw. There are few fairer fixtures this season and if the Dragons are the real deal they should be turning in pretty good sectionals over the course of the year.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	14-11-1	8-4	6-7-1
2010	20-7	10-3	10-4
2009	17-9	10-3	7-6
2008	13-12	8-4	5-8
2007	9-15	6-6	3-9
Five-Year Total	73-54-1	42-20	31-34-1

Home and Away Analysis: The Dragons have a mighty home record the last half-decade, winning 42 of 62. The breakdown for the Dragons has been 17-8 at Kogarah and 18-11 at Wollongong, the club's two primary home grounds. The Dragons' road record improved markedly under Wayne Bennett and the challenge for new coach Steve Price will be to keep St George-Illawarra almighty at home and at least competitive on the road.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	8th	5th	7th	12th	13th
Metres	1st	2nd	1st	2nd	10th
Offloads	3rd	14th	5th	3rd	6th
Tackle Breaks	6th	3rd	6th	3rd	9th
Errors	1st	1st	1st	5th	13th

Defence Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	3rd	1st	2nd	4th	8th
Metres Conceded	9th	6th	7th	10th	9th
Missed Tackles	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd	12th

Attack-Defence Rankings Analysis: Under Wayne Bennett, the Dragons improved every facet of their game and that is reflected in the numbers. The club went from a good defensive unit to an elite one, while the offense improved from stop-start with poor red-zone efficiency to an efficient attack that combined discipline and dynamism. That was Bennett though and he is no longer mentoring the Red V. Instead, first-year coach Steve Price has the job of stemming the bleeding when it comes to these metrics. Bennett's Dragons had the fewest errors three straight years and Price will certainly try to keep such discipline continuing, though a drop-off is expected. With a group of quality forwards and dynamic backs, metres made and tackle breaks have not been an issue and shouldn't be major concerns this year though the loss of Darius Boyd and Mark Gasnier should see a dip in the Dragons' tackle break numbers. Defence is the area where the biggest regression is expected though. Defence is about attitude and about patterns. The best coaches run defence-first thinking teams, building them by talking of team and confidence and individual responsibility. Price will have learnt plenty from Bennett but he simply won't have the touch of the seven-time premiership winner. A drop in points conceded and tackles missed should be expected.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	Matt Cooper	14
2010	Brett Morris	20
2009	Brett Morris	25
2008	Brett Morris	14
2007	Matt Cooper	11

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 51 (4th) 2011 Key Position: 16 (8th)

2010: 88 (15th)

Games Lost Analysis: After winning the premiership with the second most games lost, the Dragons could only make it to the second week of the finals with the fourth-best run in 2011. Every one of the club's best starting team played at least 18 games with Dean Young the most absent with eight missed matches as he battled a chronic knee injury. Centres Matt Cooper (four games) and Mark Gasnier (five) both missed time with a fractured cheekbone and hip injury respectively. The Dragons had plenty of bumps and bruises but did not lose a key player for any significant period of time though Jamie Soward played noticeably hurt for a number of weeks at the backend of the year.

2011 Betting Analysis: The Dragons were the top under team in the NRL in 2010 going 18-9 under and followed that up by going 17-9 under last year, a tally of 35-18 under over two years, a very strong trend. When the Dragons travel, the under has been a near-certainty, going 11-3 under last year and 20-6 under over the last two years. As an interstate underdog, the Dragons are 4-0 under since 2010. At night, St George-Illawarra have gone 21-11 under over the last two years while in dry weather over the same period the Dragons are 28-15 under. Once again the Dragons had a large number of games totalling 30 or under (11, down from 14 in 2010) while they again had only one match tallying over 50. In head-to-head betting, the Dragons were losing propositions at home and away, no doubt a result of an average price of \$1.46 with their average road price of \$1.47 the lowest in the NRL. Against the bookies line, the Dragons were 13-13 (29-24 over the last two years) and strongest as a home favourite (7-5 ATS, 17-10 ATS the last two years).

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$13.0

Minor Premiership: \$15.00

Top 4: \$3.50

Top 8: \$1.80

The Bookmaker: "You would think the Dragons will be on a letdown losing supercoach Wayne Bennett, Gaz and company. I'd have to risk the Dragons in 2012." -Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

Mr Rugby Assessment: Steve Price is on a hiding to nothing. Unless he makes a preliminary final I dare say the Red-V fans will be calling for his head and with this squad he may be in trouble. It is solid, it is certainly unspectacular and above all else, it enters the season on the back of a Wayne Bennett hangover. Expect the Dragons to plod through the year just either side of the top-eight cut-off. Price: \$21.00

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 56.5 (7th)

Weighted Roster Rating: 68.9 (7th)

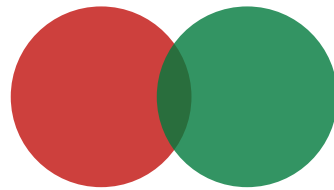
Predicted Finishing Range: 1st-10th

Predicted Finish: 7th

This is the year we find out just how important Wayne Bennett and Darius Boyd were to the Dragons' success over the last three seasons. Bennett has worked miracles at the club but without him on hand day in and day out, there are many who believe the Dragons are in for a big regression. There is no doubt the Dragons should go backwards without Bennett and Boyd. The question is: how far do they fall under Steve Price? I'm not convinced they drop as far as the market suggests though I do have them running seventh. Kyle Stanley is a superstar in the making and will thrive at fullback. Jamie Soward is a risk without Bennett but he is an undeniable talent who should continue as one of the top five-eighths in the game. Michael Weyman, fully fit, should rediscover his 2010 form. There is actually more upside with the Dragons than down. Their worst case scenario is a ninth or tenth placed showing but they can, with the right run of injuries and what is a very even draw, go all the way. Their defence is too good to finish too far down the ladder and there is a potential for their attack to find more points, particularly with such good handling and quality backs. The only real worry here is Ben Hornby, who is arguably not in the club's best 13. A strong home field advantage only further limits the downside for the Red V. They just need the players to respect the new coach, the importance of defence and the sanctity of the ball.

2012 Betting Advice: Punters and bookmakers seem happy to write the Dragons off this year but I'm not prepared to put a line through them completely. A little interest at 15.0 for the minor premiership is a solid play. The Dragons' defence is outstanding and should not regress too much, meaning they should be in most games. One bet is the Dragons to make the eight at \$1.80 with Flemington Sportsbet. Hit that. While St George-Illawarra have depth issues, they are not all that different from the side that claimed the premiership two seasons back. The \$1.80 is overs. One of the best bets is to side with the Dragons as under proposition. Taking the under when the Dragons are on the road, in a night match or playing in the dry are the best situations. The Dragons have been fairly reliable as a home favourite over the last two years.

SOUTH SYDNEY RABBITHS



Strongest Team

1. Nathan Merritt (w/fb)
2. James Roberts (w/fb/c)
3. Matt King (c)
4. Greg Inglis (c/fb/fe)
5. Fetuli Talanoa (w/c/fb)
6. John Sutton (fe/br)
7. Adam Reynolds (hb)
13. Ben Lowe (br)
12. Dave Taylor (br/p)
11. Michael Crocker (br)
10. Sam Burgess (br/p)
9. Issac Luke (h)
8. Roy Asotasi (p)

-
14. Eddy Pettybourne (br/p)
 15. Luke Burgess (p)
 16. Scott Geddes (p)
 17. Jason Clark (br/h),

Others: Dylan Farrell (c/w/fe/hb), Dave Tyrell (br), Matt Mundine (br/fe), Kane Morgan (w/c), Blake Judd (br), Josh Mansour (br/w), Chris McQueen (w/c/br), Nathan Peats (h/br), George Burgess (p), Shaune Corrigan (c/w/br), Justin Hunt (hb/fe), Ryan Carr (hb), Josh Starling (p)

Gains: Matt King (Warrington), Justin Hunt (Brisbane)

Losses: Chris Sandow (Parramatta), Luke Stuart (Retired), Ben Ross (Cronulla), Rhys Wesser (Retired), Shannan McPherson (Released), Beau Falloon (Gold Coast)

Net Recruitment Assessment: Losing Chris Sandow is a big loss for South Sydney, particularly after he had a very good season in 2011. Not chasing a big name replacement could well leave the Bunnies in the doldrums for another season with new coach Mick Maguire set to promote Adam Reynolds to the No.7 jersey. South Sydney's season will swing on the success of that decision. Speculation has been rife, however, that Matt Orford could be signing at Redfern. The club's only big name recruit is centre Matt King. King was a very good player for the Storm but is now 31 years old and has been in England for four seasons. If recent history is anything to go by, King will be a bust. Few outside backs have returned from Super League at anywhere near the level expected. The Bunnies will be hoping the discipline instilled by new coach Maguire will be enough to offset their net recruitment damage, which includes the loss of their key playmaker and a big money risk at centre.

Representative Losses: (Likely) Greg Inglis, Issac Luke, Dave Taylor, Sam Burgess.
(Possible) Roy Asotasi.

Position Ratings:

Fullback ----- 7

With Rhys Wesser now out of the picture – a major plus for the Bunnies – Nathan Merritt looks set to roll into the fullback position in what is a major upgrade. Merritt was very good when switched to the No.1 jersey last season, at one stage scoring eight tries in two weeks. His defence is questionable but there is no disputing his try-scoring ability, a must for a fullback in the modern game.

Three Quarters ----- 7

Possibly no three-quarter line has more variation in its potential output than that of the Bunnies. Greg Inglis was an epic disappointment to the South Sydney faithful in his debut season, turning up hideously overweight and not finding form until the final third of the year. If Inglis presents with the same attitude then he won't provide much but if Maguire can whip him into shape, and it is rumoured that Inglis is as fit as a bull, then he can be the same force he was at the Storm. Those expecting anything of Matt King simply shouldn't. The 31-year-old scored 58 tries in four seasons for Warrington but outside backs rarely return as even competent first graders when away from the NRL, let alone stars. The odds are King will prove a bust and a costly one at that. James Roberts and Fetuli Talanoa will be the likely wingers though Dylan Farrell is in the mix. Roberts will turn 19 on the opening weekend of the season but already has five first grade tries to his name. He has outstanding speed and should turn into quite a good player. Talanoa though is error-prone and rarely contributes positively.

Five-Eighth ----- 6.5

John Sutton has long been one of the NRL's most inconsistent players and with the Rabbitohs extending his deal until the end of the 2014 season, nothing will change unless Michael Maguire is a miracle worker. Sutton has all the skills necessary to be an effective five-eighth: a big body, a long boot, a deft step, a sweet pass, an ability to read the play. He plays like a passenger, mailing it in week after week. If Maguire can find the key to getting him to play consistently, he will have an elite pivot on his hands but the likelihood is that Sutton will just meander through another season, robbing South Sydney fans blind.

Halfback ----- 2.5

Despite nearly every halfback in the game being linked with South Sydney (Cooper Cronk, James Maloney, Thomas Leuluai, Luke Walsh, Matt Orford), the Bunnies have not landed a replacement for Chris Sandow meaning Toyota Cup half Adam Reynolds will get first crack. Reynolds missed all of last season with a knee injury, a significant warning siren. The doubts about Reynolds are significant. Ryan Carr and Dylan Farrell are the other contenders for the halfback spot.

Hooker ----- 8.5

Issac Luke is the best attacking hooker in the game and the centrepiece of South Sydney's offense. His 120-plus metres a game is 50 metres ahead of his closest hooking rival Matt Srama while he leads all hookers in tackle breaks, doubling nearest rival Robbie Farah. He is brilliant out of dummy half with speed and creativity. There are plenty of negatives to his game though. He played like an absolute grub last season, laying down and then mastering the cannonball tackle. He is a poor tackler, has dicey hands and is known to play dumb. If he can get his head right, he can be one of the top players in the game.

Prop ----- 6.5

South Sydney's pack was once again decimated by injury last year. Sam Burgess returns fit and healthy after managing only four games last season. He likes the big hit a little too much and is a touch loose with his carry but he adds some real grunt and class to the Bunnies pack. He will likely start with declining veteran Roy Asotasi, in what should be his last year with the red and green. Asotasi's 27/110 are sound numbers but the former Kiwi skipper managed only eight games last year as a wrist injury flattened him. Scott Geddes, who lasted only one game in 2011 and has not played more than 16 since 2005, is a clear-cut No.3. He is what he is but can make plenty of metres. Sam Burgess' brothers Luke and George are both at the club with Luke proving a handy find in 2011. The Bunnies will miss the reliability of Luke Stuart as they are short that honest prop who can go all day.

Backrow ----- 7

South Sydney have a strong backrow rotation and if they can stay fit, they will be sure to make an impact. The biggest name and biggest frame is unquestionably Dave Taylor. There is no questioning Taylor's ability: he is a beast, with speed and skill and an enormous body, able to bust tackles or run straight over defenders, slip balls or lay a monster shot on. The concern with him is application with Taylor renowned for going missing at times. His handling can also be a worry. He was still effective last year and he is the player I expect to see the most improvement out of under Michael Maguire, who will have him fit and ready. Michael Crocker played only his second full season since 2004 last year and he was the workhorse the Bunnies needed in the backrow. He also provided plenty of much-needed leadership. A broken foot kept the promising Ben Lowe out of action for most of 2011. He has a touch of class about him with a desire to tackle and run with real vigour. He has a bright future if he can stay healthy. Eddy Pettybourne is as tough as they come with a solid defence and a hard-to-tackle running style. Dave Tyrell hasn't come on as I'd hoped. Nathan Peats is a tough one. Jason Clark is below average. Chris McQueen is slow and lacking intelligence.

Blue Chip Players: 3- Nathan Merritt (wing), Greg Inglis (centre), Issac Luke (hooker)

Coach Rating: Michael Maguire (1st season at South Sydney, 1st in the NRL) --- 6.5

Coach History:

W-L Record: 0-0
Finals Record: 0-0
Finals Seasons: 0
Premierships: 0
Club Record: 0-0

Coach Analysis: South Sydney powerbrokers have done an outstanding job in signing Wigan coach Michael Maguire, unquestionably the club's best coaching decision since Ron Willey was brought in back in 1982. John Lang was a good coach but past his best when signed by the Bunnies. Maguire came onto the scene as an assistant to Matt Elliott in Canberra but made his reputation in Melbourne where he had a hands-on role working with Craig Bellamy. He managed to prove himself ready for an NRL job with an outstanding two-year reign at Wigan where he took the cherry-and-whites to their first title in 13 years, winning the Super League Coach of the Year award in his debut season. He followed that up by guiding the Warriors to the Challenge Cup in 2011. Maguire is renowned for his thorough professionalism, his attention to detail and his rigorous fitness regime, which combined with his adherence to strong defensive rugby league learnt at Melbourne, makes him exactly the type of boss needed by South Sydney. Maguire has a long career as an NRL coach ahead of him and could etch himself into the game's lore if he can take South Sydney back to their former glory.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	11-13	10th	3-5	3-5	5-3	DNQ	--	
2010	11-13	9th	4-4	4-4	3-5	DNQ	--	
2009	11-12-1	10th	4-4	3-4-1	5-3	DNQ	--	
2008	8-16	14th	1-7	5-3	2-6	DNQ	--	
2007	12-12	7th	4-4	3-5	5-3	0-1	Qualifying	Final

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
--Debut Season--								

Draw Analysis: Souths have hit .500 only once in the last five seasons and have played only one final since 1989 so it seems like a somewhat fruitless exercise analysing their season breakdowns. Over the last few seasons, where they have had a competitive roster, their problem has been stringing games together. At no point over that timeframe have the Bunnies gone through a sector better than 5-3. Momentum is a stranger at Redfern. South Sydney will start the season in the sun

with three of their first five matches on a Sunday afternoon. The Bunnies get five finalists in their first eight but don't get the defending premiers until round 23. Byes for Souths come early, in rounds 10 and 14, meaning they get the Dragons in round 11 and Penrith in round 17 absent Origin participants. South Sydney get a nice run around their byes with five games against non-finalists in six rounds. Aside from the Knights twice in their last nine and home games with the Dragons, Tigers and Manly the stretch is not impossible to overcome. The key for South Sydney is to build some momentum at some point throughout the season. If they can get through one sector with a 6-2 record, they are a chance of seeing finals football. If not, it will be more of the same at Redfern.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	11-13	8-4	3-9
2010	11-13	8-4	3-9
2009	11-12-1	5-7	6-5-1
2008	8-16	5-7	3-9
2007	12-13	6-6	6-7
Five-Year Total	53-67-1	32-28	21-39-1

Home and Away Analysis: Like Canterbury, South Sydney seem to garner very little home ground advantage. The Bunnies have gone 16-8 at home the last two seasons suggesting they are starting to feel more at home at Homebush. Souths' road record also happens to be appalling. Having not won a game on the road in 2006, the Bunnies managed only three wins in 2008, 2010 and 2011. South Sydney's lack of finals football is strongly linked to their inability to win on the road.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	3rd	2nd	1st	14th	16th
Metres	6th	4th	11th	9th	8th
Offloads	9th	13th	10th	9th	11th
Tackle Breaks	8th	8th	13th	9th	14th
Errors	10th	14th	8th	3rd	3rd

Defence Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	14th	13th	11th	15th	4th
Metres Conceded	15th	11th	15th	15th	11th
Missed Tackles	16th	16th	10th	11th	1st

Attack-Defence Rankings Analysis: Attack isn't a problem for South Sydney. Over the last three seasons, Souths have ranked top-three in points scored and each season missed the finals. Part of the problem is average-to-poor handling, which gives opposition teams great field position, but the bigger concern is defence. New coach Michael Maguire has his work cut out for him fixing a defensive unit that has not ranked in the top-10 in any of the three metrics in any of the last four years. The Rabbitohs have been extraordinarily consistent in their defensive mediocrity. For the last two seasons, no team has missed more tackles with Chris Sandow, Issac Luke and Dave Taylor the main offenders, combining to miss nearly 15 tackles a game. Souths always concede plenty of metres and points, last year ranking 15th and 14th in those categories respectively. Maguire comes from the Storm culture that prides defence above all and he did improve Wigan from a team that allowed 20.4 points a game in 2009 to one that allowed 15.2 in 2010 and 16.0 in 2011 but as has been witnessed with Stephen Kearney at Parramatta, it doesn't necessarily translate to teams with poor cultures. Maguire should get the Bunnies tackling but it is no certainty.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	Nathan Merritt	23
2010	Nathan Merritt	16
2009	Nathan Merritt	19
2008	Nathan Merritt	13
2007	Nathan Merritt	10

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 77 (13th) 2011 Key Position: 4 (1st)
 2010: 40 (4th)

Games Lost Analysis: South Sydney have consistently suffered more than most when it comes to injuries and so it was in 2011 with the Bunnies losing 77 games from their top 13, primarily amongst the forwards. Sam Burgess played only four games due to an ankle injury, a hand injury limited Roy Asotasi to just eight, Luke Stuart's final season came to a premature end after just five outings thanks to a knee injury and promising lock Ben Lowe only donned the cardinal and myrtle five times. While South Sydney's pack was decimated, the club could not have had more luck with key position injuries, losing only four games. Key playmakers Issac Luke and Chris Sandow played every game while John Sutton missed just one match.

2011 Betting Analysis: It was always going to end poorly last year when the Bunnies were sent out such a short quote after signing Greg Inglis and so it came to pass, Souths falling from a 15-9 ATS team to an 11-13 ATS outfit. The big fall came as an underdog. When getting points in 2010, Souths went 11-4 ATS but went only 5-10 ATS in 2011. Souths have been reasonably reliable as a home favourite, going 7-3 ATS

when chalked at Homebush. The Bunnies were again at their best at night (8-6 ATS in 2011, 18-11 ATS since 2010) and are perfect off a bye over the last two years. Betting Souths head-to-head last year resulted in a \$1.58 profit with all that coming from wins at home. Souths were again over propositions, going 14-10 over last year and 28-20 over since 2010. Over the last two years, the Rabbitohs have gone 12-4 over as a road underdog while day games have gone 13-6 over. With nine scores over 51, the Bunnies again skewed high in total points.

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$13.00

Minor Premiership: \$15.00

Top 4: \$3.50

Top 8: \$1.80

The Bookmaker: "The mail from The Burrow is that new coach Michael Maguire is rallying the troops for a full-on assault of the 2012 premiership. The big question for me is who will fill the No.7 jersey. I'd like to see Rusty Crowe one-on-one with Greg Inglis in a gladiator-style warm-up prior to all games. If GI is up for all games, his teammates will follow and so will success in 2012."

-Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

Mr Rugby Assessment: If they had a proven halfback I would be halving their quote. Michael Maguire has them training the house down, the outside backs have quality and the pack is close to the best running around. But we come back to the halves dilemma. Only time will tell. Price: \$21.00

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 51.5 (11th)

Weighted Roster Rating: 63.6 (11th)

Predicted Finishing Range: 6th-12th

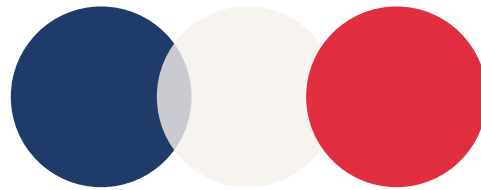
Predicted Finish: 10th

Souths fans have to be excited about Michael Maguire. For the first time in over a quarter-century, the Bunnies have a quality coach in the upswing of his career. Maguire has an outstanding resume, learning from the best under Craig Bellamy and then putting it into practice at Wigan. But he can only play what is in his hand and that hand lacks a halfback, a legitimate playmaker, depth and a culture of success. South Sydney's attack has not been a problem in recent years but without Sandow, it shapes as being a major issue in 2012. On the defensive front, Maguire should get some improvement but to be fair, he couldn't have them defending much worse. The consistent injury problems at the club should also be improved upon with a new training staff. With Greg Inglis reportedly fit and Dave Taylor sure to play

more consistent rugby league under the new coach, there is plenty of upside to the Rabbitohs but depth, discipline and playmaking issues cannot be overlooked. Maguire will certainly lead Souths to the finals. I doubt it will be in 2012 though. Another 11-win season seems to beckon for the Bunnies.

2012 Betting Advice: The best way to attack South Sydney again this year is to lay them. The Bunnies are again under the odds and can be soundly risked at the short odds for the premiership, minor premiership and top four. Whatever touch Michael Maguire has, he is working off a culture of failure and he has no halfback. It is going to take time and it is hard to picture South Sydney being at all threatening this year. Look to try Souths as a home favourite, off a bye and at night when they are at their best while they are a consistent over outfit, particularly as a road underdog and in the daylight. Be wary though: the market is again high on them and they are likely to be losing propositions in line betting.

SYDNEY ROOSTERS



Strongest Team

1. Anthony Minichiello (fb/w)
2. BJ Leilua (w/c/br)
3. Tautau Moga (c/w)
4. Shaun Kenny-Dowall (c/w)
5. Sam Perrett (w/fb)
6. Daniel Mortimer (fe/hb)
7. Mitchell Pearce (hb)
13. Braith Anasta (fe/br)
12. Mitch Aubusson (br/c)
11. Aidan Guerra (br)
10. Martin Kennedy (p)
9. Jake Friend (h/hb)
8. Frank-Paul Nuuausala (p/br)

-
14. Tom Symonds (br/c)
 15. Mose Masoe (p)
 16. Jack Bosden (br/p)
 17. Jared Waerea-Hargreaves (p/br)

Others: Anthony Mitchell (h), Justin Carney (w/c), Peni Tagive (w/c), Anthony Cherrington (br/p), Adam Henry (w/c), Tinirau Arona (p), Boyd Cordner (br), Brad Takairangi (br/c), Mark Khierallah (fb), Lama Tasi (p), Francis Vaiotu (w), Josh Ailomai (p/br), Daniel Tupou (w), Jack Littlejohn (c), Roger Tuivasa-Sheck (fb), Alofa Alofa (w), Glen Dumbrell (h), Kane Evans (p)

Gains: Daniel Mortimer (Parramatta), Peni Tagive (St George-Illawarra), Jack Bosden (St George-Illawarra), Adam Henry (New Zealand), Josh Ailomai (Newcastle), Daniel Tupou (Parramatta)

Losses: Todd Carney (Cronulla), Nate Myles (Gold Coast), Jason Ryles (Melbourne), Mark Riddell (Retired), Daniel Conn (Retired), Kane Linnett (North Queensland), Phil Graham (Gold Coast), Anthony Watts (Widnes), Cheyse Blair (Parramatta)

Net Recruitment Assessment: Fed up after a shocking capitulation following the 2010 Grand Final, brought on entirely by a cadre of skilled yet selfish types, Brian Smith dumped a number of players including Todd Carney, Nate Myles, Anthony Watts and Jason Ryles. Carney and Myles are unquestionably talented but both considered drinking far more important than the club last year and systematically derailed the season. Smith made the right call in ridding the club of its poisonous

elements, even if that means a downgrade in on-field talent. The club has also lost promising young centre Kane Linnett, a big loss at outside back where the Roosters are thin. Allowing Phil Graham to walk also hasn't helped. Mark Riddell and Daniel Conn retiring midseason had no impact on the club. Surprisingly, the Roosters were quiet on the purchasing front with Daniel Mortimer their only name signing. He is a deserving first grader and should get first crack at the No.6 jersey. The Roosters also invested heavily in youth with former Dragons backrower Jack Bosden and Warriors winger Adam Henry looking the pick of their young buys. There is no doubt the club has lost plenty in on-field talent but it was the purge the club needed to have with a more committed showing expected in 2012.

Representative Losses: (Likely) Mitchell Pearce, Sam Perrett, Shaun Kenny-Dowall. (Possible) Jared Waerea-Hargraves.

Position Ratings:

Fullback ----- 6

Anthony Minichiello is now 32 years old but despite getting an Origin recall last year, he is a shadow of the player once named the best in the world. He is reliable under the high ball, is a good tackler and is always in the right location but his speed has dropped off and there is always the threat of a career-ending injury on the horizon. Sam Perrett and Daniel Mortimer have both been touted as backups at a position the Roosters lack depth in.

Three Quarters ----- 6.5

It is a tale of two sides for the Roosters three-quarter line with the right very good and the left questionable. Shaun Kenny-Dowall had an off season last year with nine tries and 32 handling errors but was the Dally M Centre of the Year in 2010 and is a centre with plenty of tools. Sam Perrett, in the Jason Nightingale mould, is ever-reliable. He is a hard-worker who is one of the best at rucking out from his own tryline. On the other side, the situation is very much up in the air. BJ Leilua played 23 games last year but is no star, often finding himself out of position. Young prodigy Tautau Moga projects as the other centre though Justin Carney, Peni Tagive, Tom Symonds or Adam Henry could all win the job. Moga, who just turned 18, is 108kg and 193cm and is being compared to Greg Inglis, having scored an astonishing 38 tries in SG Ball/Toyota Cup last year.

Five-Eighth ----- 4.5

Brian Smith will probably play Braith Anasta at five-eighth. It would be a major mistake considering their lack of backrow stocks. Having recruited Daniel Mortimer, the former Parramatta playmaker can be used effectively at five-eighth. A new environment can turn things around for him. It has been a quick fall for the Roosters in the five-eighth department, with 2010 Dally M Medal winner Todd Carney now a player of the past.

Halfback ----- 7.5

Despite laying on 19 tries in 21 games and playing all three Origin matches, 2011 was a touch disappointing for Mitchell Pearce. The halfback struggled for consistency and was not the match-winner a player of his standing should be. He is no doubt a quality player but he needs to involve himself more and test the line with his running game. He is a player, however, who should improve now that the bad seeds have been weeded out of the club.

Hooker ----- 8

Jake Friend enjoyed a breakout year in 2011, adding a slice of attacking brilliance to his already stout defensive work. It was a remarkable comeback for a maligned player who had found so much off-field trouble that he was cut by the Roosters. Friend has learned his lesson and has excelled, winning the Jack Gibson Medal in 2011 and now enjoying the unofficial role as Cameron Smith's backup for Queensland and a possible bolter for bench selection in 2012. As usual, Friend was a workhorse in defence, finishing third in average tackles, but it was his attacking play that led to three tries and nine try assists that was the real catalyst behind his improved standing. Anthony Mitchell is a handy backup but Friend is a player who can go 80 minutes.

Prop ----- 5.5

The best thing the Roosters did for their front row stocks was punt Jason Ryles, who is a massive liability. The Tricolours still lack a touch of class up front though. Martin Kennedy is the one player the team can build around. In eight games, Kennedy went at 24 and 110 a game and was touted as a Queensland Origin contender. He is honest. The remaining prop options all strike me as show ponies more interested in more glitz than grit. Jared Waerea-Hargreaves is the most overrated forward in the game who has a dreadful workrate. Frank-Paul Nuuausala is a handful but can go missing. Mose Masoe loves a big hit but he makes only a handful of tackles a game, missing two. There is hope Dragons recruit Jack Bosden will live up to his billing and become an effective first grade prop. Brian Smith should be very concerned, however, at the lack of workrate and class available to him up front.

Backrow ----- 5.5

The Roosters backrow has very little experience outside of lock Braith Anasta, who may start at five-eighth at any rate. Anasta is a good ball-player but he is getting on and his tackling and hit-up work really needs to improve if he is used in the forwards. He is capable of it but needs to find an extra gear. Aidan Guerra is one young player I am smitten with who I think is good enough to go on and represent Australia. He is lanky, incredibly tough to tackle and he gets through a mountain of work. Think a younger Chris Houston. Mitch Aubusson is another wide runner. With those three the projected starters, the concern is work-rate and middle-third defence. There is no real tackling machine there and no player who wants to play in the middle of the park. That could leave an opening for Tom Symonds, who goes hard and is a nice prospect. Jack Bosden is a young former Dragon who has come across for an

opportunity and will likely get it. Anthony Cherrington may also get time. The lack of experience, work ethic and centre-field play in the Roosters' backrow really hurts the Tricolours.

Blue Chip Players: 2- Sam Perrett (wing), Jake Friend (hooker)

Coach Rating: Brian Smith (3rd season at the Roosters, 24th in the NRL) ----- **7.5**

Coach History:

W-L Record: 296-270-10

Finals Record: 15-14

Finals Seasons: 12

Premierships: 0

Club Record: 27-25

Coach Analysis: A lifer who has now coached at five clubs, Brian Smith could never be called a great coach having never won a premiership but there is no questioning his ability to rebuild a club on its knees. He turned the struggling Dragons teams of the late eighties into Grand Finalists in 1992 and 1993. He rebuilt Parramatta from a rabble to a powerhouse five years either side of the turn of the century. He gutted the Knights in acrimonious circumstances and built a team that made the finals in 2009. In his first year at the Roosters, he took the club from the wooden spoon to a Grand Final. And there is no doubting that the Roosters are a club that need to be rebuilt this year after a disappointing 2011 marred by a great deal of off-field selfishness. Smith made the tough but right decision to wipe the club's troublemakers, saying goodbye to project Todd Carney, international Nate Myles and Anthony Watts, among others. Smith does not accept mediocrity and he gets his teams to play competitive rugby league so don't be surprised to see the Roosters boss mould this young team into a strong unit. It is another story when it comes to the finals, however, with Smith's teams only fair in September due to the heavy, intense work he asks of his team throughout the year. It may be doubtful that Smith will ever win a premiership but to his credit his teams are usually better-drilled and more consistent than most.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	10-14	11th	2-6	3-5	5-3	DNQ	--	
2010	14-10	6th	5-3	4-4	5-3	3-1	Grand Final	
2009	5-19	16th	3-5	1-7	1-7	DNQ	--	
2008	15-9	4th	5-3	6-2	4-4	0-2	Semi Final	
2007	10-13-1	10th	2-6	3-5	5-2-1	DNQ	--	

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason Finish
2011	10-14	11th	2-6	3-5	5-3	DNQ	--
2010	14-10	6th	5-3	4-4	4-3	3-1	Grand Final
2009	10-10	*	5-3	4-4	1-3	*	*
2008	12-12	9th	4-4	3-5	5-3	DNQ	--
2007	9-15	15th	4-4	4-4	1-7	DNQ	--

Draw Analysis: The Roosters are not a team that deals with adversity well. In the two seasons they have made the finals in the last five years, they have started as winners. In the three other seasons, they have gone 3-5 or worse and failed to improve by any more than a game in the second sector, leaving the Roosters 5-11 or worse with two months of the season remaining. One positive is that the Roosters tend to finish strongly. Brian Smith's men have three winnable games in the first three rounds before a trip to Melbourne and a home game against the Warriors. The draw is open enough to allow the Roosters to start reasonably well. The Roosters get five finalists between round seven and 11 and byes in rounds 13 and 17. They play Manly and Brisbane before Origins I and II and get a huge kick from those match-ups, games they would normally have been outsiders in that become winnable. With one of the easiest runs in (seven non-finalists in the last nine rounds and the other two against the Dragons and Tigers at home) and a habit of getting home down the stretch, the Roosters will be charging up the table. If they are close enough, they sneak into the playoffs. Those looking for teams with an edge in the draw will be very fond of the Roosters this year.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	10-14	8-4	2-10
2010	17-11	8-6	9-5
2009	5-19	2-10	3-9
2008	15-11	8-5	7-6
2007	10-13-1	5-6-1	5-7
Five-Year Total	57-68-1	31-31-1	26-37

Home and Away Analysis: The Roosters have tended to put up very similar home and away records over the last five years, again reinforcing the notion that the Sydney Football Stadium offers little home ground advantage. Last year, however, the Roosters were a terrible 2-10 away from home and with a glut of early season road games, it ended their season quickly. On the road, the Roosters have been a losing proposition but during strong seasons have shown an ability to win away from the SFS, going 9-5 in 2010.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	14th	3rd	14th	9th	12th
Metres	16th	12th	16th	7th	13th
Offloads	7th	4th	9th	7th	8th
Tackle Breaks	7th	4th	16th	10th	13th
Errors	15th	10th	15th	16th	14th

Defence Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	10th	4th	16th	6th	14th
Metres Conceded	13th	8th	16th	7th	14th
Missed Tackles	5th	7th	14th	9th	6th

Attack-Defence Rankings Analysis: The Roosters have been extremely hit and miss over the last six years with their defence a particular concern. In 2006, 2007 and 2009 they were a bottom-three defensive unit with 2009 an absolute mess. Brian Smith improved the Roosters' defence markedly in 2010 but it regressed badly in 2011, falling from fourth in points conceded to 10th. Much of the blame must be put on the attack though, who finished bottom-three in handling errors for the fourth time in five years. With the Roosters' missed tackle rate solid enough at fifth, it is apparent that opponents consistently had the ball in good field position in 2011. Those handling errors have crippled the Roosters for much of the post-Brad Fittler era and Smith has done little to fix the issue in two years at the club. An inability to move the ball in 2011 also hurt the club with the Roosters ranking last in metres made. It resulted in an incapacity to score points. The Roosters need to go back to basics when it comes to their attack, respecting the ball more, working on their kick return and sharpening up their game out of dummy half.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	B.J Leilua	12
2010	Shaun Kenny-Dowall	21
2009	Shaun Kenny-Dowall	14
2008	Shaun Kenny-Dowall	15
2007	Joel Monaghan	14

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 89 (15th) 2011 Key Position: 15 (7th)
2010: 26 (1st)

Games Lost Analysis: After having the best games-lost number of the last two years in 2010, the Roosters had the second worst run with injuries and suspensions in 2011. The most felt absence was that of 2010 Dally M Medal winner Todd Carney, who missed eight games due to a groin injury and a club-imposed suspension. Nate Myles was another to get suspended by the team, missing seven games that also included his Origin absences. Exciting prop Martin Kennedy played but eight games due to a foot injury while reliable winger Sam Perrett took the field only 12 times after breaking his ankle early in the season. A dislocated shoulder also limited fringe-running backrower Mitch Aubusson to eight games. The Roosters were no hope with their off-field dramas and injury woes in 2011.

2011 Betting Analysis: The most reliable Roosters number in 2011 was the under with the Roosters finishing below the total in 16 of 24, taking their two-year under record to 32-20. The Roosters were 7-5 over at home but, astonishingly, 11-1 under on the road. Interstate, Brian Smith's team was 4-0 under. Over the last two seasons, the Roosters are 13-7 under in the day and 8-4 under in the wet. After going 16-12 ATS in 2010, a significant drop in form saw them go 10-14 against the number. The Tricolours were particularly poor on the road, going 3-9 ATS, not covering in three matches as a road favourite. They failed to cover four interstate matches. One very reliable trend is to avoid the Roosters in wet weather. Having gone 1-4 ATS in the wet in 2010, they went 0-7 ATS in 2011. As a head-to-head proposition, the Roosters were \$8.78 losers (second worst in the NRL) with all the loss coming away from home with a -\$10.00 road record (worst in the NRL).

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$26.00

Minor Premiership: \$31.00

Top 4: \$7.00

Top 8: \$2.25

The Bookmaker: "Another one of my favourites, Brian Smith, has a history of getting clubs to first base but has failed to hit a home run at Illawarra, St George, Parramatta, Newcastle and now the Chooks. Things could change though if homesick James Maloney gets an early release from the Warriors. The biggest news out of Bondi Junction will likely be, however, who is wearing what at the two biggest socialite weddings of 2012: Anthony Minichiello's marriage to Terry Biviano and Braith Anasta making an honest woman of television star Jodi Gordon."

-Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

Mr Rugby Assessment: Expect to see some new faces in the red, white and blue this year. The Roosters boast some of the best juniors in the comp and if they focus on the year at hand (and not the arrival of Maloney, \$BW and Dugan in 2013) I feel they are actually a chance to surprise. Price: \$26.00

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 51 (12th)

Weighted Roster Rating: 65.1 (11th)

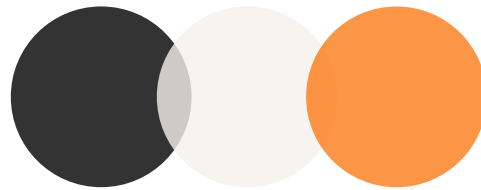
Predicted Finishing Range: 7th-16th

Predicted Finish: 11th

This is a Brian Smith kind of year. Having put the broom through the club, the veteran coach has at his disposal a young team he can mould with his intense style. He has had success in the past with teams that needed to be rebuilt and it would not surprise in the slightest to see this written-off side exceed expectations. For young players like Aidan Guerra and Tautau Moga and to a lesser degree Martin Kennedy, the sky is the limit. With a very kind draw and a decent defensive base to build from, sudden improvement would not surprise. The likes of honest players such as Sam Perrett, Jake Friend and Braith Anasta only further the prospects of a sharp upturn. Friend, in particular, is a player on the up. His attacking game really developed last year and as an 80-minute player, he can make a real impact. The Roosters do have a number of concerns though. The forward pack is fragile and not particularly balanced. The prop rotation, in particular, is concerning. The front rowers were poor last year and it is not anticipated they will get much better in 2012. Depth is also a worry. There is some upside to the Roosters this year and if they stick to their guns, bring through their young talent, don't waste money on high-profile grubs like Sonny Bill Williams and create a stable environment, they can contend in the coming years. But this year, despite the potential, the Roosters are probably just going to miss the playoffs.

2012 Betting Advice: After 24 seasons, Brian Smith is still chasing his first premiership and it would be a game man to back him scoring it in 2012. With this Roosters side, lacking in both class and depth, it would be a rather large stretch. Worth considering though is the Roosters to make the eight at \$2.50. It is probably just short of a bet but such a young side has a few breakout stars in the waiting and if they get the rub with the good draw then they can fall into the finals. Look to take the under in Roosters matches, particularly on the road and in the day. Also avoid the Roosters in wet weather games as they almost never cover when the rains are about.

WESTS TIGERS



Strongest Team

1. Lote Tuqiri (w/c/fb)
2. Joel Reddy (c/w)
3. Blake Ayshford (c)
4. Chris Lawrence (c/w/fe)
5. Beau Ryan (w)
6. Benji Marshall (fe/hb)
7. Tim Moltzen (hb/fb)
13. Chris Heighington (br)
12. Gareth Ellis (br)
11. Liam Fulton (br)
10. Keith Galloway (p)
9. Robbie Farah (h)
8. Adam Blair (p)

-
14. Ben Murdoch-Masila (br/p)
 15. Matthew Bell (p)
 16. Aaron Woods (p)
 17. Mitch Brown (w/c/fb)

Others: Matt Utai (w), Jacob Miller (hb), Tom Humble (fe/fb/hb), John Grant (w), Tim Simona (c), Matt Groat (p/br), Junior Moors (p), Jason Schirnack (br), Alan Schirnack (p/br), Nu Akeripa (c/br), Matt Hyland (br), Pat Politoni (h), Sean Meaney (w/fb/c), Ratu Tagive (w), Sam Latu (w), Dane Chisholm (hb/fe/c), Jack Spencer (br)

Gains: Adam Blair (Melbourne), Joel Reddy (Parramatta), Matthew Bell (Penrith), Tom Humble (Parramatta), John Grant (Rugby Union), Dane Chisholm (Melbourne)

Losses: Robert Lui (North Queensland), Simon Dwyer (Retired), Bryce Gibbs (Cronulla), Andrew Fifita (Cronulla), Todd Payten (Retired), Geoff Daniela (Penrith), Wade McKinnon (Hull), Mark Flanagan (St Helens), Jake Mullaney (Parramatta)

Net Recruitment Assessment: Having failed to make a Grand Final over the last two seasons with the club at the peak of its premiership cycle, Tim Sheens decided to clear out much of the forward pack, bringing in big-name Storm premiership player Adam Blair on a big-money deal. The club certainly paid overs for the glorified Kiwi but he does change the dynamic of the Tigers pack and could prove just the type of player the Tigers require to go all the way. Those cleared out include Bryce Gibbs, Todd Payten, Mark Flanagan and Andrew Fifita. Fifita has plenty of upside and could come back to hurt the Tigers but the loss of Gibbs, Payten and the under-utilised Flanagan won't be noticed. Promising former Panther Matthew Bell adds depth to the front row. The Tigers' hand was forced at halfback with Robert

Lui sacked because of some disgraceful off-field behaviour. Tim Moltzen, who is lucky to remain at the club after signing with the Dragons, should become the permanent No.7 though former Eel Tom Humble, Dane Chisholm and Jacob Miller will all contend if Sheens prefers Moltzen at fullback. It will be interesting to see what Sheens does with the No.1 jersey. Wade McKinnon has left and the coach has a smorgasbord of options. The Tigers have only marginally upgraded their roster but most importantly they changed the dynamic of their forward pack, meaning the offseason has been productive.

Representative Losses: (Likely) Benji Marshall, Chris Heighington, Chris Lawrence, Gareth Ellis. (Possible) Keith Galloway, Robbie Farah.

Position Ratings:

Fullback ----- 5

Tim Sheens could play one of five at fullback with Tim Moltzen, Lote Tuqiri, Mitch Brown, Beau Ryan and Tom Humble all in the mix for the No.1 jersey. Moltzen is favourite for the spot after finishing off the year well at fullback but he is better served as a halfback, the reason the Tigers did fight to keep him after he signed with the Dragons. Tuqiri is getting on but desperately wants to play fullback and is probably the best option. Brown, Ryan and Humble will be battling for first grade positions and while all offer something, none are outstanding options.

Three Quarters ----- 7.5

There is no questioning the depth of the Tigers' three-quarter line with as many as 10 players fighting for four spots. Most will be challenging for a wing berth with Chris Lawrence and Blake Ayshford seemingly locked in as the centre pairing. Lawrence is one of the best centres in the game and is sure to be playing down the left while Ayshford is a nice type who likes the physicality of the game and is strong defensively. That leaves Tim Sheens to choose between Lote Tuqiri, Matt Utai, Beau Ryan, Joel Reddy, rugby recruit John Grant and youngster Tim Simona for the two wing positions (and fullback). Sheens will likely use one or two in the backrow but it shapes as Ryan and Reddy getting first crack if Tuqiri plays fullback. Ryan is a good honest type whose enthusiasm is a positive. Reddy did well at an awful club and should improve under better coaching with a legitimate playmaker inside him.

Five-Eighth ----- 9.5

Benji Marshall continues to get better as a player and is without question one of the top half-dozen players in the world. The Tigers No.6 had another wonderful year where he laid on 24 tries and scored another 11 himself. A once-in-a-generation playmaker and an outstanding on-field general, Marshall's maturity has resulted in a more consistent Tigers outfit.

Halfback ----- 5.5

Forced to cut Robert Lui after his repeated acts of off-field violence, the Tigers went all-out to keep Tim Moltzen, who had signed to play with the Dragons in 2012. It is unclear if Moltzen will play in the No.1 or the No.7 but it seems likely that he will start at halfback considering the club's change of attitude after the latest Lui drama. Moltzen is better at halfback than fullback and is a decent complement to Benji but there is no question that he is among the worst-rated halfbacks in the game with plenty to prove. French halfback Dane Chisholm and the promising Jacob Miller will also be in the mix.

Hooker ----- 9

Robbie Farah is without question the number two rake in the game behind Cameron Smith and enjoyed another strong season where he ranked 30th in the *Making The Nut* Top 50 Players list. Farah started off the season slowly but finished strongly with some fine attacking play. He continues to be a key Tiger and one of the classiest hookers in the game.

Prop ----- 8

Tim Sheens identified prop as one area he needed to improve to push the Tigers into the Grand Final and the result was Bryce Gibbs and Andrew Fifita were moved on and Melbourne Storm prop Adam Blair was signed. Blair joins for big money and there is no question he adds a certain dynamism to the Tigers' pack but his output is not great and he is one of the most selfish players in the competition. He is the New Zealand vice-captain but I for one don't buy into the hype that surrounds him. There are no question marks hanging over Keith Galloway though. The big red-head finally got his due last year, making his Origin debut and playing in the Four Nations final in Leeds. Galloway never shirks the issue and is a smart player with top-notch footwork. An underrated force behind the Tigers' recent successes. Aaron Woods has come on well. After 24 appearances in his debut season, 19 off the pine, the 21-year-old has been earmarked for big things. He is certainly fearless and looks a long-term prop in the mould of a Luke Bailey. Former Penrith bench prop Matthew Bell adds some depth to the position. He doesn't offer much in attack but is a hard tackler. I am not overly excited about young prospect Matt Groat but the club seems to have a high opinion of him.

Backrow ----- 9

Gareth Ellis has been in the NRL three seasons and has already won the Wests Tigers best and fairest award three times. He arguably would have been named in any All-NRL team in each of those years as well. He plays the game with such desire, such fervour, such will that it is hard not to be inspired by his showings. He is a beast who runs great lines, tackles hard and gets through plenty of work. Chris Heighington is a similar type. His hands sometimes let him down but he loves hitting the line hard and has a romantic entanglement with tackling. A delight to watch. Liam Fulton, if it is possible, is even more underrated. He gets little credit but he is a player with 35/70 numbers who can set up tries and bust tackles with deft ball-

playing. They are an outstanding trio. It is just a shame that Simon Dwyer sadly had his promising career snuffed out last year with a nerve injury as he was the type of fringe runner the Tigers are missing. Ben Murdoch-Masila may be used in the same sort of role but he doesn't have the upside of Dwyer.

Blue Chip Players: 6- Chris Lawrence (centre), Benji Marshall (five-eighth), Gareth Ellis (backrow), Chris Heighington (backrow), Keith Galloway (prop), Robbie Farah (hooker)

Coach Rating: Tim Sheens (10th season at the Tigers, 28th in the NRL) ----- **8.5**

Coach History:

W-L Record: 328-305-11
 Finals Record: 19-13
 Finals Seasons: 12
 Premierships: 4
 Club Record: 111-114

Coach Analysis: The most experienced coach in the NRL, Sheens has an up-and-down resume. Sheens guided the Raiders to their maiden premiership in '89 and subsequently premierships in '90 and '94. He then had an unsuccessful run at the Cowboys from '97 to '01 before moving to the Wests Tigers in 2003 and winning an unexpected title with them in '05. The Tigers then dramatically underachieved over the next four seasons, missing the playoffs every year until 2010 where they went within a field goal of rolling eventual premiers St George-Illawarra in the preliminary final. Last year they blew a big lead in a semi final they should have won against New Zealand. Sheens, a renowned thinker and innovator with a penchant for attacking rugby league, has toughened the Tigers up defensively over the last two seasons and it has reaped rewards. Consistency has not been the club's hallmark though and he has struggled to keep a lid on supposed internal fractures among the playing group. There is no doubting his ability as a top-line coach but there are question marks over his shelf life at the Tigers, where his methods may be getting stale and his words carrying less weight. If the Tigers do not make the Grand Final this year, they may look at another mentor.

Club 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason	Finish
2011	15-9	4th	4-4	3-5	8-0	1-1	Semi Final	
2010	15-9	3rd	4-4	6-2	5-3	1-2	Preliminary Final	
2009	12-12	9th	4-4	2-6	6-2	DNQ	--	
2008	11-13	10th	4-4	3-5	4-4	DNQ	--	
2007	11-13	9th	4-4	5-3	2-6	DNQ	--	

Coach 5-Year Results:

Year	Record	Finish	1-8	9-16	17-24	Finals	Postseason Finish
2011	15-9	4th	4-4	3-5	8-0	1-1	Semi Final
2010	15-9	3rd	4-4	6-2	5-3	1-2	Preliminary Final
2009	12-12	9th	4-4	2-6	6-2	DNQ	--
2008	11-13	10th	4-4	3-5	4-4	DNQ	--
2007	11-13	9th	4-4	5-3	2-6	DNQ	--

Draw Analysis: There are few more consistent teams in the NRL, at least in terms of starting, with the Tigers going 4-4 over the first eight rounds the last six seasons. From 2006-09, they continued to plug on for between six and eight wins to finish between ninth and 11th. The last two seasons have seen the club find momentum afterwards, going undefeated in the last sector in 2011 and 6-2 in the middle third in 2010. The Tigers open the season with four home games in their first eight and three matches against finalists. Matches against Manly and the Dragons in rounds two and three will provide a key early test for the Tigers. Byes come in rounds 10 and 17 – a nice spread – with matches against the Warriors and Storm before Origins I and II. Another big finish is expected with the Tigers taking on only three finalists in the last nine weeks with two of those at home. The smart money is on the Tigers again starting 4-4 and bolting to another high finish late in the season.

Home and Away Record:

Year	Record	Home	Away
2011	16-10	10-4	6-6
2010	16-11	10-3	6-8
2009	12-12	7-5	5-7
2008	11-13	5-7	6-6
2007	11-13	5-7	6-6
Five-Year Total	66-59	37-26	29-33

Home and Away Analysis: The Wests Tigers record between 2006 and 2009 was remarkably consistent, winning between 10 and 12 games each year and between five and seven home games. At no stage over the last five seasons have the Tigers won more than six games on the road, including the last two years, their only two finals seasons since their 2005 premiership. The Tigers did show remarkable improvement at home over the last two seasons with a 20-7 home stand, assisted by games at Leichhardt and Campbelltown, being critical to landing the Tigers consecutive top-four berths.

Attack Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Scored	5th	6th	3rd	5th	7th
Metres	8th	6th	4th	14th	7th
Offloads	8th	16th	13th	10th	10th
Tackle Breaks	2nd	5th	7th	1st	11th
Errors	11th	6th	6th	1st	1st

Defence Rankings:

Category	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Points Conceded	6th	6th	7th	11th	11th
Metres Conceded	7th	10th	3rd	11th	10th
Missed Tackles	6th	4th	8th	14th	11th

Attack-Defence Rankings Analysis: The big change for the Tigers over the last three seasons has been their emphasis on defence. The Tigers attack has been fairly consistent over the last five seasons where they have been among the top teams. In points scored, tackle breaks and to a lesser extent, metres gained. The one outstanding issue for the Tigers from 2011 was their poor handling, which fell from sixth in 2010 to 11th in 2011. Defensively, the Tigers struggled with missed tackles and points conceded from 2006 to 2008 but started showing signs of improvement in 2009 and have been consistently strong since. Over the last three seasons the Tigers have finished sixth-to-seventh in points conceded and fourth-to-eighth in missed tackles. The Tigers are a sound all-round team, again a top-six unit on both sides of the ball. The defence should again be steady but an attempt to make the attack more dynamic could see a slight improvement in points scored.

Leading Tryscorers:

Year	Leading Tryscorer(s)	Tries
2011	Benji Marshall	13
2010	Lote Tuqiri	18
2009	Taniela Tuiaki	21
2008	Chris Lawrence	10
2007	Chris Lawrence	16

Games Lost to Injury/Suspension/Rep Duty:

2011: 66 (10th) 2011 Key Position: 4 (1st)
2010: 91 (16th)

Games Lost Analysis: The Wests Tigers again suffered a worse-than-average games lost record but led the NRL in games lost by key position players with only four games lost from their spine. The worst injury suffered by the club was to Australian centre Chris Lawrence, who played only nine games after suffering a cruel hip injury before a hamstring strain. Winger Lote Tuqiri also played only nine games after breaking his forearm early in the season. Champion second rower Gareth Ellis also had to deal with calf and ankle injuries that saw him miss eight matches while boom second rower Simon Dwyer had his career ended mid-season by a nasty nerve injury, severely denting the hardness of the Tigers' pack. Despite the poor run of injuries, the Tigers finished fourth and had most of their big names back by September.

2011 Betting Analysis: Still regarded as a loose team by bookmakers and punters, the Tigers once again proved the conception a fallacy with another big under season, going 15-11 below the total and 31-22 under over the last two years. A 10-4 under record at home took the Tigers to 18-9 under on their own turf over the last two years. Night matches have also proven particularly profitable taking the under with the Tigers, going 13-7 under last year and 25-13 under since 2010. The Tigers in wet weather have gone 7-1 under the last two years. Despite a top-four finish, the Tigers were well found by punters, going only 13-13 ATS in 2011, taking them to 28-25 ATS since 2010. The best bet on the Tigers has been as an underdog, where they went 6-3 ATS and are 13-6 ATS over the last two seasons. As a home dog, the Tigers are 5-1 ATS since 2010. Tim Sheens' teams have been good bets coming off Monday Night Football (4-1 ATS the last two years) and in wet weather (3-0 ATS in 2011, 7-2 ATS since 2010)

See Appendices A and B for complete betting data on each individual team

2012 Flemington Sportsbet Odds:

Premiership: \$9.00

Minor Premiership: \$7.00

Top 4: \$2.35

Top 8: \$1.45

The Bookmaker: "The one thing stopping me tipping the Tigers to claim the 2012 premiership is the biggest ego in the game. Can he be controlled?"

-Flemington Sportsbet chief bookmaker Jason Sylvester

Mr Rugby Assessment: The best roster in the comp with a mix of brilliant ballplayers, pace out wide and power up front. Tim Sheens has a plethora of experienced internationals to call upon but it is the solid young depth that also encourages my confidence. Only the uncertainty at halfback can be used against them when discussing weaknesses. My clear pick. Price: \$6.50

Final Assessment:

Roster Rating: 62 (3rd)

Weighted Roster Rating: 77.1 (3rd)

Predicted Finishing Range: 1st-6th

Predicted Finish: 3rd

The Wests Tigers are once again in the premiership mix. In the third year of their title window, they have a team that can go the distance. The Tigers are a team with very few flaws. They have arguably the best playmaker in the game. They have class and try-scoring ability in the outside backs. The forward pack contains five internationals with hooker Robbie Farah one of the few rakes with legitimate playmaking flair. Little has changed at the Tigers. They still have a smart coach, are chock full of blue chip players and have great depth. The only real flaws are at halfback and fullback. Tim Moltzen will cover one position adequately but whoever fills the other spot will need to lift. In order to improve the Tigers' chances, Tim Sheens has decided to further strengthen the team's defensive capabilities by signing Adam Blair. Blair brings a certain fierceness lacking in a pack of predominantly hard workers. He comes from the Storm school so brings with him adept wrestling skills and a certain mongrel. Sheens has seen which way the winds are blowing and is backing his defence to lift the Tigers to their first title in seven seasons. It is good in theory and could well come off in practice. If luck stays with the Tigers and Benji Marshall again plays nearly every game then it is hard to see them not playing in a preliminary final at the very least. Deserved premiership favourites who will hit the finals with plenty of momentum again on the back of a front-loaded draw.

2012 Betting Advice: Bookmakers have betting on the Tigers spot on. They are a certain contender, capable of winning the minor premiership and the title, but at the odds they can't be bet. As an average starting team, they may become backable in the first two months of the season but I'd want at least \$11. Well rated by punters as well, as they have been over the last two years, the Tigers are rarely weekly betting propositions. They are a slight winner but there isn't much in it. As an underdog they can be bet with confidence and are safe plays in the wet but are a team that should generally be treated for what they are: a good team that everyone knows are good. Punters should, however, look to take the under in Tigers matches. The Tigers' identity has fundamentally changed and Tim Sheens is heading more to the wrestling path this year after getting fed-up with officials and administrators for not combating the issue. They are defence oriented and should again prove a very strong under team, particularly at home and at night.

FORECAST 2012 PREMIERSHIP LADDER

Position	Team	Wins-Losses
1	Melbourne	18-6
2	Newcastle	18-6
3	Wests Tigers	17-7
4	New Zealand	15-9
5	Manly	15-9
6	Brisbane	14-10
7	St George-Illawarra	13-11
8	Gold Coast	12-12
9	North Queensland	11-13
10	South Sydney	11-13
11	Sydney Roosters	11-13
12	Canterbury	10-14
13	Penrith	10-14
14	Canberra	7-17
15	Cronulla	5-19
16	Parramatta	5-19

APPENDIX A: AGAINST THE SPREAD RECORDS FOR 2011 SEASON PT 1

	BRIS		CANB		CANT		CRON		GC		MAN		MELB		NZ		NEWC	
	W	L	W	L	W	L	W	L	W	L	W	L	W	L	W	L	W	L
ATS Betting																		
Overall	17	10	6	18	14	10	11	13	8	16	16	11	15	11	16	12	13	12
Home	9	5	4	8	9	3	5	7	5	7	11	4	8	6	7	5	5	7
Away	8	5	2	10	5	7	6	6	3	9	5	7	7	5	9	7	8	5
Favourite	11	6	3	7	8	3	8	3	2	6	14	8	14	10	9	5	4	5
Underdog	6	4	3	11	6	7	6	10	6	10	2	3	1	1	7	7	9	7
Home Favourite	7	4	2	6	4	1	4	3	2	5	11	4	8	6	6	3	4	5
Away Favourite	4	2	1	1	4	2	4	0	0	1	3	4	6	4	3	2	0	0
Home Underdog	2	1	2	2	5	2	5	4	3	4	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	2
Away Underdog	4	3	1	9	1	5	1	6	3	6	2	3	1	1	6	5	8	5
Interstate Favourite	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	4	3	2	0	0
Interstate Underdog	4	3	1	3	0	3	0	1	3	1	1	2	1	1	6	5	2	3
Favourite 0.5-6 points	7	4	2	6	7	1	1	2	2	6	5	4	9	2	3	2	2	4
Favourite 6.5-12 points	2	2	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	8	4	4	5	6	3	2	1
Favourite 12.5 plus points	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	3	0	0	0	0
Underdog 0.5-6 points	5	3	0	7	4	7	3	4	3	3	0	3	1	1	4	4	7	4
Underdog 6.5-12 points	1	1	2	4	2	0	4	5	2	5	2	5	0	0	3	3	2	3
Underdog 12.5 plus points	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	1	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Day Matches	2	1	1	9	4	2	5	2	0	3	7	2	6	2	7	5	10	4
Night/Twilight Matches	15	9	5	9	10	8	6	11	8	12	9	9	9	9	9	7	3	8
5-Day Back-Up	2	0	1	2	2	0	1	3	0	1	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	1
7-Day Plus Back-Up	6	1	0	8	3	2	2	0	3	3	4	3	6	4	7	4	5	0
Off Bye	1	5	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	2	2	0	1	1	1	1	0	2
Off Monday Night Football	2	0	1	2	2	1	2	2	0	1	0	2	5	0	1	0	0	3
In Good Weather	11	7	5	17	11	6	10	10	7	14	12	11	12	9	13	9	12	8
In Damp/Wet Weather	6	3	1	1	3	4	1	3	1	2	2	0	3	2	3	3	1	4
On Friday	10	7	1	1	6	3	0	3	2	6	3	3	1	2	3	0	1	0
On Saturday	3	2	2	7	2	4	5	5	5	6	5	3	6	3	5	7	2	5
On Sunday	2	1	1	1	4	2	5	2	0	3	7	2	6	3	7	5	9	4
On Monday	0	0	2	9	2	1	1	3	1	1	1	3	2	3	1	0	1	3
Head To Head Betting																		
Average Price	\$1.73		\$2.05		\$1.85		\$2.46		\$2.23		\$1.59		\$1.47		\$1.88		\$1.98	
Average Home Price	\$1.57		\$1.76		\$1.89		\$2.08		\$1.90		\$1.39		\$1.39		\$1.60		\$1.68	
Average Away Price	\$1.92		\$2.45		\$1.82		\$3.03		\$2.59		\$1.85		\$1.57		\$2.27		\$2.39	
Home Profit/Loss	\$2.49		-\$1.54		\$3.48		\$1.28		-\$5.25		\$2.51		\$2.21		-\$0.69		-\$0.97	
Away Profit/Loss	\$2.10		-\$2.90		-\$5.22		-\$2.35		-\$3.30		\$1.41		\$3.86		\$1.95		\$1.40	
Total Profit/Loss	\$4.59		-\$4.44		-\$1.74		-\$1.07		-\$8.55		\$3.92		\$6.07		\$1.26		\$0.43	

APPENDIX A: AGAINST THE SPREAD RECORDS FOR 2011 SEASON PT 2

	NQ		PAR		PEN		ST G		SOU		SYD		WS		OVERALL	
	W	L	W	L	W	L	W	L	W	L	W	L	W	L	W	L
ATS Betting																
Overall	14	11	11	13	13	11	13	13	11	13	10	14	13	13	201	201
Home	8	4	6	6	6	6	7	15	7	5	7	5	8	6	112	89
Away	6	7	5	7	7	5	6	8	4	8	3	9	5	7	89	112
Favourite	7	3	1	5	3	4	11	12	6	3	4	6	7	10	105	96
Underdog	7	8	10	8	10	7	2	1	5	10	6	8	6	3	96	105
Home Favourite	7	2	1	4	3	3	7	5	4	1	4	3	5	5	76	60
Away Favourite	0	1	0	1	0	1	4	7	2	2	0	3	2	5	29	36
Home Underdog	1	2	5	2	3	3	0	0	3	4	3	2	3	1	36	29
Away Underdog	6	6	5	6	7	4	2	1	2	6	3	6	3	2	60	76
Interstate Favourite	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	14	14
Interstate Underdog	4	6	2	2	2	3	2	1	1	1	0	3	1	0	33	43
Favourite 0.5-6 points	5	2	0	5	3	3	4	6	5	3	4	5	2	5	61	60
Favourite 6.5-12 points	2	0	1	0	0	1	6	3	1	0	0	1	4	5	38	29
Favourite 12.5 plus points	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	6	7
Underdog 0.5-6 points	7	4	5	4	7	2	2	1	2	6	4	5	6	3	60	61
Underdog 6.5-12 points	0	3	5	3	3	4	0	0	2	4	1	3	0	0	29	38
Underdog 12.5 plus points	0	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	7	6
Day Matches	1	2	1	3	2	5	7	5	3	7	3	7	3	3	62	62
Night/Twilight Matches	13	9	10	10	11	6	6	8	8	6	7	7	10	10	139	139
5-Day Back-Up	1	1	2	3	3	0	2	3	2	2	0	2	2	2	22	21
7-Day Plus Back-Up	5	4	1	3	1	1	3	5	3	2	4	5	4	5	57	53
Off Bye	2	0	1	1	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	2	0	2	18	14
Off Monday Night Football	1	1	2	2	1	0	3	3	1	2	1	1	2	1	25	23
In Good Weather	11	8	9	9	10	9	10	11	8	11	10	13	10	13	159	159
In Damp/Wet Weather	3	3	2	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	0	0	3	0	42	42
On Friday	2	3	2	6	4	2	2	6	6	3	2	5	5	5	50	50
On Saturday	9	6	5	3	6	5	2	0	1	2	4	3	4	3	66	66
On Sunday	1	2	1	3	2	4	5	5	3	6	4	3	3	3	60	60
On Monday	2	0	3	1	1	0	4	2	1	2	0	2	1	2	25	25
Head To Head Betting																
Average Price	\$1.95		\$2.25		\$2.17		\$1.46		\$2.17		\$1.95		\$1.81		\$1.90	
Average Home Price	\$1.66		\$2.01		\$1.88		\$1.45		\$2.06		\$1.82		\$1.67		\$1.71	
Average Away Price	\$2.36		\$2.56		\$2.56		\$1.47		\$2.33		\$2.11		\$1.97		\$2.13	
Home Profit/Loss	\$3.41		-\$2.52		\$1.58		-\$0.34		\$3.43		\$1.22		\$1.78		\$12.08	
Away Profit/Loss	\$1.48		-\$7.35		-\$5.25		-\$3.55		-\$1.85		-\$10.00		-\$1.22		-\$30.79	
Total Profit/Loss	\$4.89		-\$9.87		-\$3.67		-\$3.89		\$1.58		-\$8.78		\$0.56		-\$18.71	

APPENDIX B: TOTAL POINTS RECORDS FOR THE 2011 SEASON PT 1

	BRIS		CANB		CANT		CRON		GC		MAN		MELB		NZ		NEWC	
	OV	UN	OV	UN	OV	UN	OV	UN	OV	UN	OV	UN	OV	UN	OV	UN	OV	UN
Total Points Betting																		
Overall	12	15	12	12	11	13	14	10	12	12	12	15	9	17	10	18	9	16
Home	6	8	6	6	5	7	4	8	6	6	7	8	3	11	4	8	5	7
Away	6	7	6	6	6	6	10	2	6	6	5	7	6	6	6	10	4	9
Home Favourite	3	8	4	4	3	2	1	3	4	3	7	8	3	11	3	6	4	5
Away Favourite	3	3	2	0	2	4	0	0	0	1	4	3	6	4	3	2	0	0
Home Underdog	3	0	2	2	2	5	3	5	2	6	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	2
Away Underdog	3	4	4	6	4	2	10	2	6	5	1	4	0	2	3	8	4	9
Interstate Favourite	2	2	1	0	0	0	10	0	0	1	0	1	6	4	3	2	0	0
Interstate Underdog	3	4	0	4	2	1	3	1	5	4	0	3	0	2	3	8	2	3
Day Matches	1	2	7	3	3	3	3	4	2	1	5	4	0	8	7	5	6	8
Night/Twilight Matches	11	13	5	9	8	10	11	6	10	11	7	11	9	9	3	13	3	8
Off Bye	2	0	1	1	0	2	0	2	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	2	0	2
Off Monday Night Football	0	2	0	3	2	1	2	2	1	0	0	2	2	3	1	0	3	0
In Good Weather	11	7	12	10	8	9	12	8	11	10	10	11	7	14	7	15	9	11
In Damp/Wet Weather	1	8	0	2	3	4	2	2	1	2	2	4	2	3	3	3	0	5
On Friday	8	9	0	2	2	7	3	0	2	6	3	3	0	3	1	2	1	0
On Saturday	3	2	3	6	5	1	6	4	7	4	3	5	5	4	2	10	3	4
On Sunday	1	2	7	3	3	3	3	4	2	1	5	4	1	8	7	5	5	8
On Monday	0	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	3	3	2	0	1	0	4
Total Points Breakdown																		
0-20	0		1		2		1		0		2		2		2		2	
21-30	10		2		3		4		3		8		8		4		6	
31-40	7		7		7		5		9		6		9		10		7	
41-50	8		8		8		9		10		9		4		11		5	
51-60	1		3		4		3		1		1		3		0		3	
61-70	1		3		0		2		1		1		0		1		2	
71-plus	0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0	

APPENDIX B: TOTAL POINTS RECORDS FOR THE 2011 SEASON PT2

	NQ		PAR		PEN		ST G		SOU		SYD		WS		OVERALL	
	OV	UN	OV	UN	OV	UN	OV	UN	OV	UN	OV	UN	OV	UN	OV	UN
Total Points Betting																
Overall	14	11	12	12	11	13	9	17	14	10	8	16	11	15	90	111
Home	7	5	6	6	7	5	6	6	7	5	7	5	4	10	90	111
Away	7	6	6	6	4	8	3	11	7	5	1	11	7	5	90	111
Home Favourite	4	5	2	3	5	1	6	6	3	2	4	3	4	6	60	76
Away Favourite	0	1	0	1	1	0	3	8	2	2	0	3	4	3	30	35
Home Underdog	3	0	4	3	2	4	0	0	4	3	3	2	0	4	30	35
Away Underdog	7	5	6	5	3	8	0	3	5	3	1	8	3	2	60	76
Interstate Favourite	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	15	13
Interstate Underdog	6	4	2	2	2	3	0	3	0	2	0	3	1	0	29	47
Day Matches	2	1	1	3	5	2	5	7	6	4	3	7	4	2	30	32
Night/Twilight Matches	12	10	11	9	6	11	4	10	8	6	5	9	7	13	60	79
Off Bye	0	2	2	0	1	1	2	0	1	1	0	2	1	1	13	19
Off Monday Night Football	2	0	2	2	0	1	3	3	2	1	1	1	2	1	23	22
In Good Weather	10	9	12	6	10	9	8	13	11	8	6	11	10	13	77	82
In Damp/Wet Weather	4	2	0	6	1	4	1	4	3	2	2	5	1	2	13	29
On Friday	2	3	2	6	3	3	2	6	6	3	1	1	2	8	19	31
On Saturday	9	6	5	3	4	7	1	1	2	1	2	7	4	3	32	34
On Sunday	2	1	1	3	4	2	4	6	5	4	4	6	4	2	29	31
On Monday	1	1	4	0	0	1	2	4	1	2	1	2	1	2	10	15
Total Points Breakdown																
0-20	2		2		1		2		2		1		1		11	
21-30	3		6		4		9		3		8		5		44	
31-40	7		5		8		7		4		5		8		54	
41-50	8		9		9		7		6		6		8		64	
51-60	4		0		2		1		3		2		3		16	
61-70	0		2		0		0		6		2		1		12	
71-plus	0		0		0		0		0		0		0		0	

APPENDIX C: BLUE CHIP PLAYERS

Fullback

MEL-Billy Slater
NEW-Darius Boyd
CAN-Josh Dugan
MAN-Brett Stewart
PAR-Jarryd Hayne

Wing

NEW-Akuila Uate
PEN-Michael Gordon
NZ-Manu Vatuvei
DRA-Jason Nightingale
DRA-Brett Morris
ROO-Sam Perrett
BRI-Jharal Yow Yeh
NQ-Kalifa Faifai-Loa
SOU-Nathan Merritt
GC-Kevin Gordon

Five Eighth

TIG-Benji Marshall
NEW-Kurt Gidley
MAN-Kieran Foran
DRA-Jamie Soward
MEL-Gareth Widdop

Centre

MAN-Jamie Lyon
BRI-Justin Hodges
SOU-Greg Inglis
TIG-Chris Lawrence
DRA-Matt Cooper
COW-Brent Tate
PAR-Willie Tonga
PEN-Michael Jennings
BRI-Jack Reed
GC-Jamal Idris

Halfback

MEL-Cooper Cronk
NQ-Jonathan Thurston
MAN-Daly Cherry-Evans
GC-Scott Prince
NZ-Shaun Johnson

Backrow

CRO-Paul Gallen
MAN-Glenn Stewart
BRI-Corey Parker
TIG-Gareth Ellis
PEN-Luke Lewis
BRI-Sam Thaiday
CAN-Shaun Fensom
TIG-Chris Heighington
GC-Ashley Harrison
NEW-Chris Houston
PAR-Nathan Hindmarsh
BUL-David Stagg
DRA-Ben Creagh
WAR-Simon Mannering
NQ-Dallas Johnson

Hooker

MEL-Cameron Smith
TIG-Robbie Farah
SOU-Issac Luke
ROO-Jake Friend
NZ-Nathan Friend

Prop

NQ-Matt Scott
BRI-Ben Hannant
GC-Luke Bailey
BUL-James Graham
BUL-Aiden Tolman
TIG-Keith Galloway
BRI-Petero Civoniceva
GC-Luke Douglas
NEW-Kade Snowden
PAR-Fuifui Moimoi

ABOUT NICK TEDESCHI

Nick Tedeschi is a freelance rugby league writer and betting industry consultant. He has written extensively over the last six seasons on “The Greatest Game of All,” penning words for Making The Nut, where he is editor-in-chief, and Punting Ace. Nick is also the editor of The Footy Almanac: Rugby League, the chief rugby league writer for Back Page Lead and can be found at RLeague, Betfair and Sportshub.

Nick has discussed both the big and small issues during his time in the game, naming names and calling shots at anyone who dares wind him into a frenzy over anything he perceives as an attack on the sport or a travesty of justice. For the past five seasons he has written a weekly rugby league column titled “From The Couch” and for the past five years he has written an annual Top 50 List, ranking the 50 best players in the NRL.

With a great deal of experience in the betting industry as both a bookmaker and a commentator on wagering issues, Nick Tedeschi is well placed to opine on gambling matters and provide rugby league betting advice. Nick has been wagering on rugby league for as long as he can remember and has served as a price consultant for many years.

Nick can be heard regularly as a panellist on the Sportzfan radio program on Southern FM and on the “Better For The Run” podcast on Back Page Lead, writing at www.makingthenut.com and on Twitter @NickTedeschi.

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