



# Uncommon Heroes: The hard men and raw talent that built rugby league

John Ellicott

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*Uncommon Heroes* transports you back to a time when rugby league was a bruising tribal contest of local rivalries, muddy grounds were packed with fans and the corporate juggernaut of today's game was all but a distant dream.

Much more than a weekend game and points table, rugby league was an all-inclusive family - a grassroots phenomenon loyally followed for generations. Players ran onto sodden fields and survived on their wits, natural brawn and the kind of mateship that transcended club allegiances, state lines and national borders.

Often men of little means, their names have faded like the newspaper clippings of their exploits. Through knockabout anecdotes and warm-hearted stories, *Uncommon Heroes* brings to life the legacies of players like Eric Weissel, Tom Kirk, Ronnie Coote, Lionel Williamson and the Warialda brothers Les and Noel Cleal, who would play in the fierce local contests, the Foley Shield and the Maher Cup, and end up in the big cities, or playing for their state and for Australia.

Their names were once emblazoned across the sports pages. They became uncommon heroes. Dreams came true.

**John Ellicott** is the author of *Waterhouse & Smith: The power of two racing dynasties*, and *A Year on the Punt: about country racing*. He has over two decades of experience as a journalist for some of Australia's major newspapers.



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