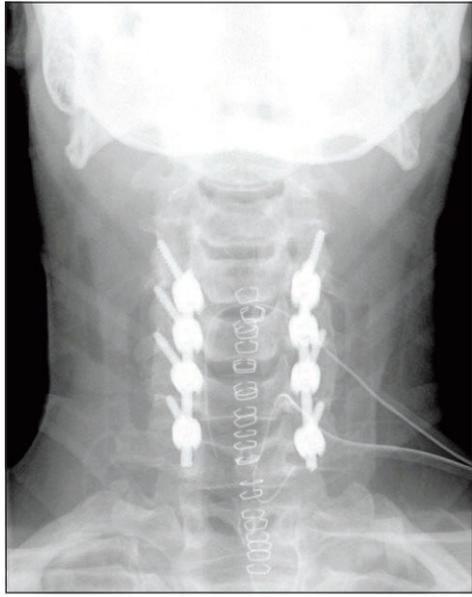


OPINION

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EDITORIAL

Scrum and tackles: spinal injury in football



THE rugby codes, in all of their variations, are intensely physical contact sports.

While injuries are common enough, they are something that every footballer thinks will happen to someone else. Luckily, even serious injuries, like broken bones, will eventually heal, even if they do sometimes result in long-term legacies.

But spinal injuries are in another category altogether, so much so that the paraplegia or quadriplegia that almost always results from fractured vertebrae is by its nature permanent, despite some substantial breakthroughs in treatment techniques.

And despite a series of football rule changes introduced in this more safety-conscious age, accidents still do happen. The Hunter sporting world was reminded, once again, of this on Saturday when a Windale

Eagles back-rower, Damian Jobson, suffered a shockingly unlucky injury in a game against Newcastle University.

Taken to John Hunter Hospital with diagnosed damage to his C4 and C5 vertebrae, Jobson was flown to Royal North Shore Hospital on Sunday night for further specialist treatment.

Situations such as this tend to bring out the best in a community, and he and his family can hopefully take some reassurance from knowing that skilled medical care, combined with the full support of the Hunter Region, will help provide him with the best possible chance of a full recovery.

In the Hunter, news of a spinal footballing injury acts as an immediate reminder of the cruel blow dealt to Newcastle Knights player Alex McKinnon – also a back-rower – and whose 2014 injury also centred on the C4

and C5 vertebrae. Since then, the National Rugby League has hardened its stance on lifting tackles, as well as toughening up on shoulder charges and concussion.

Scientific studies of footballing accidents have found most rugby union spinal injuries happen in scrums. This was the case last year when Maitland Blacks hooker Dom Punch was injured in a grand final.

In rugby league, the tackle is usually the culprit, although Jobson's case is perhaps more unusual than most in that he was the tackler, rather than the tackled player, when his injury occurred.

The sheer unpredictability of such an occurrence shows again why insurance is mandatory in such situations. On behalf of the region, the *Newcastle Herald* wishes Damian Jobson the fullest recovery possible.

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GREG CAMERON

Election is the time to revisit a container terminal plan

A CONTAINER terminal at the Port of Newcastle will bring economic benefits to the New England electorate of the incumbent federal MP, Mr Barnaby Joyce, Australia's Deputy Prime Minister.

The economic benefits will in fact apply throughout northern NSW. The jobs in Newcastle and the Hunter region that would be facilitated by a container terminal deserve the support of the business community, unions, media and all elected representatives. They provided unstinting support in 1997 when a container terminal was first proposed by BHP. There is every reason to do so again. A federal election provides the opportunity.

Mr Joyce is able to support a container terminal by calling on his own government to implement Commonwealth legislation in the form of the *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (CCA).

The problem Mr Joyce can resolve is the Australian government's refusal to confirm or deny that the NSW government applies a charge on containers at the Port of Newcastle. Such a charge would probably breach Section 45 of the CCA, which makes it unlawful for a corporation to lessen competition in a market. The CCA applied to the NSW government while it was carrying on a business at the Port of Newcastle as "Newcastle Port Corporation".

The Australian government is failing to implement the CCA by refusing to disclose if it has any knowledge about a charge on



SECRECY: The Australian government is failing to implement the CCA by refusing to disclose if it has any knowledge about a charge on containers at the Port of Newcastle.

containers at the Port of Newcastle. Mr Joyce is able to ask his National Party colleague in the state government, Mr Duncan Gay MLC, Minister for Roads, Maritime and Freight, if the NSW government applies a charge on containers. However, should Mr Gay refuse to answer this question on grounds of confidentiality, this will be consistent with the NSW government's refusal to confirm or deny there is a charge.

Without a charge, the NSW government will be required to pay compensation to NSW Ports from consolidated revenue. This compensation is payable when container ships use the Port of Newcastle instead of Port Botany and container movements exceed 30,000 per year, increased annually for a margin which the government calls "organic growth". Over the remaining 96 years of the Port Botany lease, the amount of compensation payable to NSW Ports could easily exceed the amount raised from selling the lease. If the charge on containers is unlawful, or unenforceable, the government will be forced to pay compensation from

consolidated revenue. However, it seems the real purpose of a charge is to make it commercially unviable for Port of Newcastle Investments to build a container terminal in the first place.

A container terminal at the Port of Newcastle would provide the cargo for building a rail freight bypass of Sydney, between Newcastle and Glenfield, in south western Sydney. This new line would not take-in Moorebank and therefore the new intermodal terminals would compete with the intermodal terminal at Moorebank proposed by the Australian government and supported by the NSW government. This is one of the reasons why neither government will admit to a charge on containers at the Port of Newcastle.

All politics is local. The Member for New England is in a privileged position to find out on the public record whether the NSW government applies a charge on containers at the Port of Newcastle.

Greg Cameron is a former BHP Newcastle public affairs manager and now a Canberra-based analyst

WEB WORDS

TIME FOR NRL TO GO WESTS

The NRL left Matt Gidley in charge of the rebuild. Matt has put in place a plan, Hired Nathan Brown, and Nathan Brown is in the early stages of building his team. It won't happen overnight but needs a good 3 years to get competitive. The Knights and supporters need to understand that and support the team and the club through this.

- Nathan Clarke

Remember those of us who paid \$700 for couple of season tickets. Not cheap. If they don't compensate or discount season ticket holders next year you'll hear crickets chirping on the stands

- MarkD

The problem is money and roster. You can't throw kids in against men in this league it's not like the old days they're all full time professionals. Nothing gets fixed for the Knights until the front office gets fixed.

- Seano

I am a Wests member and like a hell of a lot of other Wests members don't want the club to have that liability. Why should this club lose money on this lot.

- tonyoldfella

SPLIT OVER LIGHT RAIL DELAY

People drive to Newcastle and park their car. That is the beginning and end of the Newcastle transport debate.

- John

Progress is great but it's got to be practical .. this proposal is not! For example (and there is many) merging 2 lanes into 1 makes no sense especially where the east end is ramping development up. Let's zoom that "artists impression" above out to see the absolute traffic snarl where lanes merge. A recent example of this where the new uni construction saw a lane closed had immediate impact on traffic flow and driver attitude. Where are the studies and plans for additional parking as it is a dream to predict that the population will suddenly have a revelation to spend 20 extra minutes getting to work so they can ride on a fancy new tram. Public transport to be successful needs to be direct and efficient.

- Danno

Put the light rail on what should be the rail corridor. On the rail corridor solves many problems with the current plan.

- Newcastle Flyer



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