

#THRUNTHRU



2019  
MEMBER  
FORUM  
RECAP

On Tuesday 24 September, Gold Coast Titans Members were asked to participate in the Club's Members Forum at Griffith University, to discuss the Club's 2019 season and future direction.

Members were asked to contribute their questions via email before the event. These questions were then collated and put into three topic silos to be answered by three members of the Titans senior management. They were:

Executive Chairman Dennis Watt – whole-of-Club and NRL-related issues  
Chief Executive Officer Steve Mitchell – Titans business performance  
Head of Performance and Culture Mal Meninga – Titans football matters

We thank the large number of Members who attended the evening, as well as those that contributed questions.

The evening was overwhelmingly positive and optimistic, and a reinforcement that our Members live and breathe the qualities we expect from every Titan – resilience, accountability, pride and trust.

The over-arching message from the evening is that the Titans WILL succeed, but only if everyone plays their role – coaches, players, staff and Members.

For the benefit of those Members unable to attend on the evening, below is a brief summary of the topics covered on a night we were united and proud to be Titans.

**Dennis Watt**  
**Gold Coast Titans**  
**Executive Chairman**

1. Review of 2019 season

- The performance of the NRL team was a major disappointment. Most judges thought we were a top-eight side. Injuries played a part, but the upside is that most players will be up and running for the start of pre-season.
- Outside of the NRL team, the Club has had significant wins in other areas, with new investment in junior development reaping early rewards.
- The Club's front office and off-field leadership are in great shape.
- Changing culture takes time. There has been an enormous amount of work done, and more still to be done for enduring success.
- A total of 14 players are off-contract this season. Not all of them will get new deals.
- The Club has a massive heart in terms of its commitment to community and we are going in the right direction.

2. Relocation rumours / Titans' future on Gold Coast

- Titans lack of on-field results led to speculation, on the back of reports Channel 9 wanted another team in Brisbane, that we would be moving to Brisbane. Channel 9 told us they want more Queensland content, not less.
- The Titans will not be moving from the Gold Coast. We are committed to this area. There is 110 years of rugby league history in our region.

3. Mal Meninga's role at the Club

- Mal is in charge of a massive body of work that has begun with embedding the right values and daily behaviours in the Club. A part of that is having the Titans embracing what is an enormous rugby league community in our region and working together in a united front.

4. New Club structure

- In the past 12 months, the Titans have seen changes in coaching staff, the Chief Executive Officer, Head of Football, new Commercial team; recruitment and development.

- “We are very happy with the front office. We are very lucky to have owners who are prepared to invest, with no thought of monetary reward to ensure the Titans are successful. It is all coming out of their pockets. What they want to do is get the Club to a point where it is self-sustaining, and then give it back to a community ownership model. It is selfless – extraordinary, quite frankly.”

#### 5. Overall position of the Titans

- Happy with growing capability of the club outside of the NRL team.
- Titans-contracted juniors have enjoyed great success this year, auguring well for the future. Northern Rivers Titans won the Andrew Johns Cup (under-16) in NSW. Tweed Seagulls won the Mal Meninga Cup (under-18) in Queensland, and then the national under-18 title against Illawarra.
- Six local junior development players will join the NRL squad for pre-season, including Toby Sexton – the Australian Schoolboys five-eighth who has joined the Titans on a three-year deal.
- Proud of work done in Community, junior development, women’s rugby league and Physical Disabilities Rugby League.
- “Losing really hurts. It is the fact there are so many great people willing this club to succeed, including the people in this room. They have given their loyalty; they have given their emotional investment; their financial investment, their unwavering belief. They deserve to have success. This year was a major disappointment, and it hurts. And I know that I am only hurting half as much as a lot of other people.”

#### 6. Titans Community Club at Oxenford

- Representing another \$25 million investment. It will be up and running in March of 2021.
- Oxenford was the chosen location because that is where it will work. A lot of research went into finding the best location.
- The club will be a great community contributor and will also help underwrite the costs of junior development and community.
- “Rugby league clubs are beset by a lot of variables – scheduling, the weather, injuries to your (team) spine. Scheduling is a big one. We copped three Friday night games this year at 6pm. When those timeslots are handed out, they are actually a massive financial penalty against you in terms of lost crowd and corporate support.

#### 7. Message to Titans Members

- “We have made massive strides in the last 18 months. There has always been that question mark about whether the Titans are going to survive or not. We are not going to just survive – we are going to thrive. You (our Members) have paid the price. You have shed blood with us. But the best is yet to come. I employ you to stick with us, because the next part will be the best part.”

**Steve Mitchell**  
**Gold Coast Titans**  
**Chief Executive Officer**

#### 1. First season at the helm

- After stints with the Cowboys, and Melbourne Rebels, and CEO of Touch Football Australia; Steve said he enjoyed working back in a sport he loved and was excited by the opportunity to work at the Titans.

- The Titans have incredible promise; the opportunity was massive, and he is excited about what the Club can achieve in the future.

## 2. First priorities as CEO

- Steve said there were areas of the business that needed a level of sophistication brought to the business to deliver and drive revenue. We have great people here who have kept the business moving through the tough years.
- Steve is excited about our home at Cbus Super Stadium, and the potential we have there for further activations and further enhancement of the game-day experience.
- Steve says the work of the Titans Community Foundation is close to his heart. Having been at the Cowboys for six years previously and seeing the difference that club's community work made to the region, the sky was the limit for the Titans.
- Our next five years are "incredibly exciting".

## 3. Position of the Titans as a business

- On-field results have a direct impact on business. "But I am not in the business of making excuses. If we get our backyard in order, we don't have to worry about much. We need to make the Club sustainable, and I am about delivering value to (the Members), our sponsors, our corporates, our government partners.
- If we get more luck with the draw – for example, hosting the Warriors on a Saturday night instead of 6pm on a Friday night – that has a material impact on the performance of the Club across the year.
- We are very fortunate to have our owners guiding us through this period. But on-field performance is intrinsically linked to the bottom line, and that is why a winning team is of paramount importance to the Titans.

## 4. Why Membership matters

- Members go through every hill and valley with us and have been on the whole journey. We are enormously in debt to you for your loyalty.
- Members matter from the business point of view as commercial stakeholders. "Every time we go out and have a chat with an organization about engaging with us – whether it be a government program, a corporate investment piece, or around stadiums or infrastructure – they will always talk to us about our Membership group. What that Membership group looks like; who they are; what their number is; where they are; why they follow you? Without a strong Membership base, we can't have those conversations. It is an enormously important building block to a Club being successful long-term."
- Steve's message to Members was, having done the hard yards, stick around for the good times.
- "What I want to tell you is that I see the work that is going on in the background. Don't miss the journey that is ahead of us. You guys have been through the tough times. We have had a tough year this year. The foundations that are being put in place behind the retail shop-front window are, from my 12 years of experience, extraordinary. Jump on board with us next year, stick with us."

## 5. Titans off-field successes in 2019

- "If you watch a PDRL kid run out onto Cbus and play against Preston, that is unbelievable. If you watch some of the women from our Women's Invitational who grew up as girls with dreams to play to the big stage, to see them pull on an NRL jersey for that day out, that is extraordinary. But it

is hard to top watching Ethan Sloane (Chief Morale Officer) roll into work every week.”

#### 8. The road ahead for the Titans

- “The opportunities are broad and vast. The biggest challenges will be our support. This can’t all be up to Justin Holbrook. One of the big challenges in our club next year is for our footy guys to get it together and play as a collective, so we can all move forward.”

### **Mal Meninga** **Gold Coast Titans** **Head of Performance and Culture**

#### 1. Review of 2019 season

- The expectations on the squad for this year was around our value system – what we expect from Titans players. What is the DNA; who are they; what kind of passion do they have for the jersey?
- We built a set of values which represents the Titans going forward – being Resilient, Accountable, Proud and Trustworthy.
- “This year was not about expecting us to finish eighth. It was about living up to what is expected of a Titans person. We haven’t lived up to that.”

#### 2. Roster changes for 2020

- Squad will stay largely the same for next season because of salary cap constraints.
- “That is not a bad thing. We used 32 players this year, based on injuries and form and health. We have exposed a lot more players to first grade. Cohesion and combinations will be better next year.”

#### 3. Performance expectations for 2020

- Our expectations are for the footy team to live up to our values.
- “That is who we want to be and that is what we are working towards. It is not about where we want to finish. The Storm don’t talk about where they will finish. They talk about game by game; winning every game. That is what the top teams do. We want to set winning standards and habits where, every time they play, they’re a chance of winning.”
- “We want to create that one game where we play for 80 minutes. Then, we want to replicate that over 25 rounds.”

#### 4. New Titans Head Coach Justin Holbrook

- Asked what made Justin Holbrook the right choice as the new Titans Head Coach, Mal was very direct: “He is a winner. We did our homework. He wasn’t just plucked out of the air because he was winning over there.
- “We did a lot of research with people he had worked with before, players that had been under him before. We talked to Trent Robinson. We talked to Craig Bellamy. We talked to all the ones that actually give a damn about this club, who want the Titans to be successful.
- “There is not one person who has not given him a wrap. Not one who has said he can’t manage a team.
- “The technical and tactical side, that is easy. That is bread and butter. It is how you manage your people, how you get the best out of your people. They are the characteristics that he has that made him best suited to this Club.”

#### 5. Titans playing style moving forward

- “We’re going to train damn hard in the off-season, and we are going to introduce higher standards. Rugby league is a combative sport. You’ve got to love the collisions. Defence wins competitions. There will be a huge focus on our defence in the off-season.”

#### 6. The salary cap situation

- Mal said all clubs are free to negotiate with players available for the 2021 season from November 1 – and the Titans would be both “active” and “aggressive”.
- Players would only be brought to the Titans if they can improve the roster and complement the local Gold Coast youngsters who are being developed by the Titans’ junior systems.

#### 7. Player retention

- Mal said Jai Arrow and AJ Brimson were allowed to test the market early. We want them re-signed as soon as possible. Part of the Titans’ new approach to recruitment and retention centres on a holistic approach to the player’s post-football career – providing educational or occupational opportunities for life after the NRL.

#### 8. Focus on Gold Coast local juniors

- The next wave of Gold Coast Titans – the ones born, raised and emotionally invested in the Gold Coast and the Club – will be the template for the future. Current players like Tanah Boyd, Darius Farmer and Toby Sexton fit that template, and that is why they are at the Club.

#### 9. Development pathways

- Our relationships with leading schools like Keebra Park and Palm Beach Currumbin are excellent. We have good relationships with player managers through recruitment manager Ezra Howe. We are highly visible at junior carnivals. Our scouting network is doing a good job identifying the best talent at an early age.
- Ezra, the Junior Kiwis coach and Assistant Coach for the Kiwis Test team, works closely with Jamie McCormack and Matt Srama in our development system.

#### 10. NRL squad recruitment

- Experience and leadership are two key traits the Titans are looking for when it comes to external recruitment. But the quality of the people is the primary focus. Low-maintenance people are the priority, and the Titans’ recruitment strategy is built around delivering that.

#### 11. Vision for the Titans

- “I see what is happening behind the scenes here. I see the hard work going on. I know we are judged by what happens on the weekend with the footy team. That is our challenge, and I love that. I want to be here when we start winning grand finals. I want to see this club winning premierships based on the systems we are building now and the people we have here now. I am emotionally invested here now.”