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State of Origin – The Biggest Sporting Event in Australia

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There is no doubt that Rugby League is a major Australian sport, albeit that its main support base lies in Queensland and New South Wales. Unlike many other sports, where the national

team playing is the biggest event for that sport, in Rugby League the interstate clash between Queensland and New South Wales is the biggest event of the year.

Part of the reason that State of Origin is such a major national sporting event is the carry on that takes place around the event - far away from the activities on the field. This year's series is no different; it has been as much about Israel Folau and now Andrew Johns, as it has been about the actual game.

We hear a lot of over use of the word "professionalism" in professional sport, but these two incidents are decidedly amateur.

ARL Chairman Geoff Carr's recent comments on radio stating that Folau should not be allowed to play and his reasons are astonishing. His comment that Folau's situation is completely different to Gasnier's, who was allowed to play when he was heading off to French Rugby, is hard to rationalise. Phil Gould commented on television that as soon as someone announces they are going to play with someone other than in the NRL their contract should immediately be paid out and their engagement terminated. It seems to me these types of comments are petulant.

What makes Rugby League people believe that they own their players? Rugby League was born out of Rugby Union and the professional

game poached players from the amateur game for a century. Now professional Rugby Union, and worse still AFL, are poaching Rugby League players. Carr and Gould believe these players must be immediately excommunicated and damned for their disloyalty, until of course they come back to Rugby League when they will be welcomed with open arms. That is what we have seen with Sailor, Rogers and Tuqiri.

Sport is a business. The laws that apply to employment, competitive and anti-competitive behaviour are the same as those that apply for the rest of business.

Then we get to Andrew Johns. Johns was a great player, but if in his thirties as a professional coach he does not know that you cannot call opposition players "black expletive", then he just hasn't been listening. One would question his intelligence, maturity and certainly appropriateness for the job.

Even his comments after the event that he is concerned that he has upset some players seems to indicate that he still doesn't get it. He hasn't upset a few players; he has upset an enormous number of Australians who find those comments distasteful and objectionable.

The fact that Channel 9 intends to take no action is hard to follow. As one commentator has said, he would not have kept his job in the media in the United States.

But, as the line goes... "The show must go on", Wednesday night was a great game of football (provided you're a Queenslander). It followed the 30-year trend - it was an exciting match, played with passion and commitment. Rugby League will continue... but at what cost?