

THE VOICE OF GOD

ROBERT CROSBY REFLECTS ON THE IMPACT OF RAY WARREN AFTER THE VOICE OF RUGBY LEAGUE CALLED TIME ON HIS CAREER AS A COMMENTATOR.

Ray Warren changed rugby league in a way like few others in the game's history.

Think of an iconic moment and, in all likelihood, it is accompanied by a voice so distinct it transcends the sport itself.

"Marshall skips away."

"Was he onside?"

*"Albert'll score, Albert'll score!
Newcastle, have won, the grand final!"*

Such is the legacy the man beloved by all as 'Rabs' leaves behind as a caller.

In the days since Warren brought a close to his illustrious career, fans from across the rugby league divide have been united in their outpouring of adoration for the man who defined rugby league on television.

Everyone has a memory of 'Rabbits'; whether it was the sound of his voice, his rapport in the box with Sterlo, Fatty and Gus or capturing a moment in time through the excitement he brought through his commentary.

On a personal level, Ray Warren represented something deeply aspirational to me as a rugby league fan.

Growing up in the regional centre of Dubbo in my youth, I knew I couldn't be like David Peachey or Andrew Ryan, the local legends who went on to star in the NRL.

To say I was found wanting for athleticism would be an understatement, but what I lacked in ability on the field I made up for by immersing myself in old matches, stats and the history of the game.

I dreamed of growing up and being just like Ray Warren calling rugby league on television - what could be better than that!

The dream I had as a boy didn't die with the man I became.

Instead, it changed and during eight seasons as a contributor with LeagueUnlimited I have been blessed with an outlet where I can express my passion in a way that isn't burdened by the pressures of a job.



For fans, like me, who fell in love with rugby league during the 2000s and 2010s, there are touchstones that unite us in a shared passion.

Reading Big League, playing the NRL video games, collecting Footy Tazos, awaiting the release of team lists each Tuesday and, above all else, listening to Ray Warren on the Channel 9 coverage all played instrumental parts in our love of the game.

I've lost count of the number of matches I've watched over the years, yet I'll never forget my very first between Newcastle and Manly in 2006.

The Qualifying Final, won by the Knights 25-18, is a match that doesn't get its due as a result of the high watermark set by its 1997 ARL Grand Final predecessor.

As an 11-year-old, the come-from-behind victory is a classic that changed my life forever.

More than 15 years on from that fateful September night, watching at home on television, I can vividly recall the way Ray Warren brought meaning to the action occurring on-screen.

He was able to capture the drama, rivalry and to-and-fro of the contest with an evangelical quality.

"Johns is wide away to the left."

"Here's Johns - no, it's gone back to Mullen."

"Mullen takes the shot."

"Jarrod Mullen's got the shot. Jarrod Mullen has nailed it. Jarrod Mullen has kicked the drop goal."

Rugby league became a religion for me in that moment and Ray Warren was the voice of God.

I will always treasure the joy Ray Warren provided me with as a footy fan.

There will never be another Rabs and we should all be so grateful to have lived in a time where the voice of rugby league brought so much joy to so many people year after year.