

Extra time

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RAT PACK
An Aussie rugby team
wins hearts in Cuba

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That Corey Hughes is a cheeky bastard. If he takes the piss, someone put one on his chin



Diary of a HITMAN

Adrian Morley talks about his life as an NRL enforcer and the moment of madness that ended his Roosters career

BY the start of 2005, I'd missed 14 NRL games through suspension. I'd been banned on eight separate occasions, with all but one being for careless high tackles. But I'd never been sent off.

That changed when we played the Bulldogs in Round 6, when Paul Simpkins dismissed me for a high shot on Matt Utai. It was a penalty at worst. Thankfully, the Roosters won the game without me and I didn't get a suspension, but it got to me. I started feeling there was a bit of a witch-hunt against me. It got to a point where I only had to catch a player high and the ref would give a penalty.

It was our first year without Brad Fittler, and we struggled at times.

When he was younger, Freddie may have got the captaincy for being the best player. As well as being obscenely talented, he was diplomatic, smart, a decent lookin' fella; the poster boy for a captain. But he grew into the role and became a real leader. He was tough, and

he carried an aura about him. He could come up with the big plays when they were needed, and crack a game open. He was a freakish talent at times.

In Round 10, we travelled to New Zealand to take on the Warriors.

In our last meeting the year before, their forward Awen Guttenbeil had floored Ned Catic with a great shot. But instead of walking away, Awen stood over Ned, mouthing off at him. We won the game, but afterwards Ricky Stuart blew up at us.

"If any player, from any team, does that to one of us," he screamed. "You f...ing go over and chin him."

That was in my mind as we took to the pitch at Mt Smart stadium.

I thought, I've got a green light from Ricky to nail him. Legally or illegally, he was going to get it. It was nothing personal, because Awen was a good fella, but he'd made the book - my self-compiled list of blokes to go at. I didn't have to wait long for my chance. He came off the bench in the first half, got the ball early, I lined him up and cleaned him out. It was a sweet shot, and it was legal, too.

Out of all my shots... that one on Guttenbeil was probably my favourite from my time in the NRL.

In the airport, waiting for our flight home after that match, Ricky pulled me to one side.

"You got a minute, mate," he said. I followed him to the bar, where he perched himself on a stool and ordered two large bourbons. The drinks arrived, we chinked glasses, and we downed them in one gulp. He didn't even say a word, and he didn't need to. It was his way of showing his appreciation for what I'd done, and it meant a lot to me.

Once I'd signed to go back home (the following year), I questioned whether I'd made the right decision. I loved my life in Coogee, the Aussie lifestyle, the Roosters. My exit didn't make me more determined to have a strong



finish, but it definitely made me more aware that I didn't have long left.

We faced the Bulldogs in Round 20, and before we ran out Ricky gave us specific instructions.

"That Corey Hughes is a cheeky bastard," he said of their hooker. "If he takes the piss, someone put one on his chin."

Sure enough, Ricky was right. Hughes was a niggling player, and I spotted him putting his knees in on the tackle. I waited for my chance. I tackled him, got to my feet. I was second marker. Hughes shoved the first marker in front of me. A green light flashed. It's on.

I rushed at him, ready to clock him one, just like Ricky wanted. Trouble was he hadn't seen me, and was bent over to play the ball. Instead of just stopping, or waiting, or retreating, I carried on. And kned him right in the head.

I thought it would start a brawl. I cocked my fist and braced myself for a flurry of punches. But I looked a round and everyone was looking at me with the same expression on their faces. An expression which said, "What the f... are you doing?"

I didn't know. The ref sent me straight off, and I had no complaints. I was so annoyed with myself. Hughes was fine, and why wouldn't he be? Seriously, it was the girliest knee ever. It was more a shove with my knee, rather than a UFC strike into his head.

The media lapped it up. When I turned up for the judiciary, it was like something out of the OJ Simpson trial. There were camera crews everywhere. I pleaded guilty straight away, hoping they'd go easy on me. There were six games left and I was desperate to play for the Roosters at least once more. Willie Mason, the Canterbury prop, even wrote and asked for leniency on my behalf, saying it would be a shame if I never got to play in the NRL again.

I thought that was a great gesture, because I hadn't asked him to do it. I sent him a text afterwards to thank him.

The judiciary came back with their verdict. Seven matches. My Roosters career was over. I was shattered. I couldn't believe that was it.

Our last game of the season, against St George Illawarra, was at the Sydney Cricket Ground. I had a couple of beers while the boys were warming up, then I made my way down to the sheds. Before a match, we'd huddle in a circle just before we ran out.

I had my suit on, but I joined the huddle. I looked around at the boys, and it hit me. I'm never going to be in this huddle again. I started filling up. Once Craig Fitzgibbon, our captain, starting talking, I couldn't hold back. I held on to them tight and cried my eyes out.

The boys went out and ended up getting beaten 36-16. Amos Roberts scored two tries, Fitzzy was terrific and Brett Finch played a blinder. But when Ricky hushed the players to present his final coach's man of the match prize, he picked me, because I showed so much emotion before the game.

The boys applauded, but Finchy was quick to take the piss. "How unfair is that," he said to me. "I played my bollocks off out there - and you get an award for crying your eyes out."

» These are edited extracts from **MOZ: My story**



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