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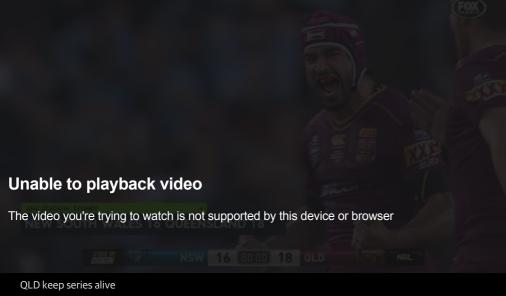




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Sport

State of Origin 2017: Queensland beats NSW 18-16 to send series to decider

Peter Badel The Courier-Mail 4 minutes ago

JOHNATHAN Thurston. You are a genius ... even when you are busted.

Queensland's remarkable record-breaking dynasty is still alive after an injured Thurston defied 50 minutes of pain to stun the Blues 18-16 in an Origin epic last night at ANZ Stadium.

Before a crowd of 82,259, the Blues had one hand on the shield when they withstood a second-half Maroons onslaught to lead 16-12 entering the dying stages of Origin II.

But summoning every fibre of Queensland spirit, the Maroons conjured a great escape, with Dane Gagai sensationally crossing for his second try to level scores at 16-all two minutes from time.

With thousands of Blue and Maroon hearts beating beyond control, Thurston was the ice man, landing a booming sideline conversion to break NSW and save Queensland from a series defeat.

Incredible.

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Johnathan Thurston kicks the winning conversion for Queensland. Picture: Peter Wallis



Johnathan Thurston celebrates after kicking the winning conversion.

This was not a win. This was another Maroon miracle. A victory for guts, grit and unyielding self-belief.

It was the type of performance that evoked images of Wally Lewis in his pomp. Thurston injured his shoulder in the 30th minute and it was limp for most of the match, but the Maroons talisman refused to surrender ... and his





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Queensland cohorts rode his wave of inspiration.

But whether Thurston survives to preserve his own fairytale is the great unknown. The Houdini effort sets up a thrilling decider at Suncorp Stadium on July 12, leaving Thurston racing the clock to be fit for what would be his 38th and final game for Queensland.

The Blues led 16-6 at half-time and looked in control for much of the second stanza, but a Gagai double in the 52nd and 78th minutes underlined why this Queensland side never says die.

"He had nearly every joint in his body strapped up. He is a warrior," Maroons skipper Cameron Smith said.



Valentine Holmes celebrates the opening try with his Maroons teammates. Picture: Peter Wallis

"Some of the things he has gone through and to play like that at this level is remarkable.

"I really don't know how he gets up for these matches. It really is quite unbelievable. His body is not 100 per cent, there is no doubt, but he finds a way to make things happen.

"The play that got us the win was that goalkick. I don't know how many other people could put that kick over.

"I just said to him before the kick, 'You are the best. Go and kick it'."

Asked if Thurston will be fit for Origin III, Queensland coach Kevin Walters said: "I'm not sure, our medical staff will have to have a look at him."



From the opening minutes, this interstate clash wasn't about wrestle and niggle. It was whether NSW had the nerve to trump Queensland's desire.

Given NSW's dominance in Origin I, the Maroons needed to score first to renew confidence and it came after just nine minutes with a movement that vindicated Darius Boyd's selection at centre.

Attacking NSW's right edge, the ball was shifted quickly to Boyd, who showed superb hands to release debutant Valentine Holmes for his maiden Origin try and a crucial 6-0 lead.

It should have been the catalyst for a Maroons onslaught. Instead, the Blues, galvanised by greater belief, held their nerve.

Three tries in the space of 13 minutes to Jarryd Hayne (14th), Brett Morris (24th) and Mitchell Pearce (27th) rocked the Maroons and gave NSW the type of lead that wins Origin games.



Gavin Cooper, Johnathan Thurston and Billy Slater celebrate Queensland's win.

But, typically, this magnificent Maroons side refused to wilt. Dynasties are not built or broken easily. As long as Thurston is around, Queensland are never six feet under.

- "Even at half-time, we were quite positive," Queensland coach Kevin Walters.
- "I am happy for the players. They were put through the wringer during the week.

"This Queensland team has so many champions that you always think you are a chance no matter the scoreboard."

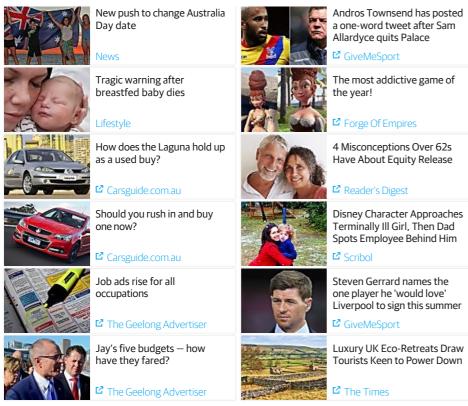
QUEENSLAND 18 (D Gagai 2 V Holmes tries J Thurston 3 goals) bt NEW SOUTH WALES 16 (J Hayne B Morris M Pearce tries J Maloney 2 goals) at ANZ Stadium. Referee: Matt Cecchin, Gerard Sutton. Crowd: 82,259.

Originally published as 'You are the best. Go and kick it'

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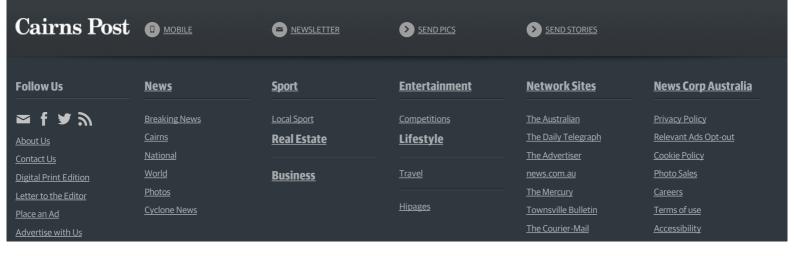
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