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State of Origin III: Queensland Maroons crush NSW Blues to continue era of dominance

By Dan Colasimone

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VIDEO: Queensland Maroons clinch State of Origin series (ABC News)

Queensland has snuffed out any talk of a New South Wales Origin revival with extreme prejudice, crushing the Blues 22-6 in the 2017 series decider at Lang Park.

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Valentine Holmes scored a classy hat-trick while Cameron Smith loomed large over proceedings with a commanding performance as a series that looked so hopeful for NSW ended in complete despair for the Blues.

Queensland may have been missing one of the all-time legends in Johnathan Thurston, but fellow future immortal Smith made up for his absence in spades with one of the great Origin displays.

His Melbourne Storm teammate, Cameron Munster, was also immense on debut, taking the lead from his captain to produce a showing jam-packed with both flair and composure.

Prop forward Jarrod Wallace scored Queensland's fourth try, which was the final nail in the coffin for the Blues, who had stirred some hope of a comeback with a Josh Dugan four-pointer in the 48th minute.

For all the talk of the Blues' talent-laden squad and its ability to end Queensland era of dominance, in the end it was the Maroons who once again stood tall in the clutch moments in Game II before dominating their opponents completely in the decider.

The Blues may have looked the better side for the first three halves of the series, but they head south of the Tweed having lost yet another series, their 11th in 12 years.

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ABC Grandstand Origin III- Cameron Smith Post Game Presentation

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Queensland dominates from the outset

As is the tradition, Game III shaped as the most expansive in the opening minutes, though neither team troubled the scorers. Queensland especially tested the waters with some slick passing movements, with heavy involvement from Smith and Munster through the centre.

That pressure eventually paid off after 15 minutes, with Holmes planting successfully in the corner after a jinking Billy Slater run set up Michael Morgan to take on the Blues defensive line and supply the killer final pass.



PHOTO: Valentine Holmes was on the end of everything Queensland conjured.

It looked like Cooper Cronk had another moments later when Slater sliced them oven again, but the half-back went to ground too early and had the football punched out of his grasp by a desperate Brett Morris just before the tryline, with the video ref overruling the try.

The veteran Slater, who was an injury doubt before the game, was also brilliant throughout, both defensively and when springing forward in attack.

With a quarter of the match gone, NSW was groggy and teetering on the ropes. They attempted to counter punch, but it was another of Queensland's big names who floored the Blues.

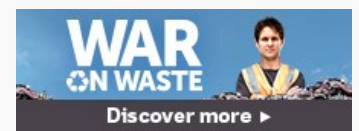
Smith once again made the break. Queensland made a raid for the right corner, creating numbers down the left and, instead of putting the ball through several pairs of hands, Cronk produced a marvel of a kick which flew low over NSW heads and directly into the hands of Holmes. The winger simply had to fall over the line for his second try.

Queensland looked a sure bet for a third just before the break when Gillett got his head in the way of a NSW pass and Glasby gathered the crumbs before storming off in the direction of the line.

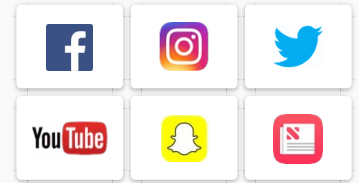
The big man does not have the pace to match his power and work ethic, though, and was mowed down 10 metres out by James Maloney.

The otherwise perfect Smith essentially bombed the try on the following play when the Maroons spread it wide with numbers, attempting to step inside his defender rather than pass to one of the two unmarked men to his left.

Blues find themselves within striking distance



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PHOTO: Jarrod Wallace dived over to ice the game for the Maroons. (AAP: Dan Peled)

The Blues had a massive task ahead of them in the second half but the early signs were not great. Captain Boyd Cordner spilled the pill near the half-way line to continue his side's error-strewn performance from the first 40.

And the Maroons almost capitalised in the next set, with Slater embarking on another elusive run before offloading an overhand pass to Chambers, who could not quite hang on to it to cross in the corner.

It was getting desperate for the Blues and they managed to come up with a crucial try within 10 minutes of the restart. From a seemingly innocuous situation, Maloney put up a towering kick into the right corner and Dugan flew over Chambers before helping himself to four points.

Maloney converted and all of a sudden the Blues were within a converted try, trailing 12-6.

The Maroons snuffed out the fightback before it really got going thanks to another Holmes four-pointer. This one was set up brilliantly by Munster, who spotted a gap behind Mitchell Pearce and set off on a jaggling run, then floated a pass to his winger who juggled, regathered, then dived over in the corner.

The home team then effectively iced the match and the series thanks to a Wallace try under the posts — with Smith and primarily Munster again the architects.

The Australian captain sent a spiralling pass out to the left before Munster sent a miraculous ball back inside, enabling the big forward to rumble forward almost unchallenged to touch down.

It was an extraordinary display from a Queensland side missing Greg Inglis, Matt Scott, Darius Boyd and Thurston, and supposedly on the brink of decline.

Young gun Dane Gagai, perhaps Queensland's best in games one and two was named man of the series.

Smith called Thurston up to the podium to help him lift the Origin shield, calling him the greatest player to pull on the Maroon jersey.




PHOTO: Cameron Smith called Thurston the greatest player to pull on a Maroons jersey. (AAP: Dave Hunt)

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