



PEOPLE



Beyond *the* try-line

With the afterglow of Australia's hard-fought win over England in the final of the Rugby League World Cup still shimmering, **Luke Derbyshire** sat down with former coach of the Australian Kangaroos and revered league icon Chris Anderson to discuss his transition from the playing field to the world of construction, rail and mentoring young people into full time careers.

FATHER and son Chris, right, and Ben Anderson.





CHRIS ANDERSON is a living legend of Australian rugby league.

His career as a player and coach is illustrious, with national and international accolades too numerous to list.

Chris played more than 230 games for his beloved Canterbury Bulldogs, including two premierships, before turning to coaching. He took on the role of foundation coach for the Melbourne Storm in the mid 1990s, taking the club in the AFL heartland to its inaugural premiership in 1999. And he served as head coach for Australia's national team, the Kangaroos.

But this story isn't to reminisce about Chris' sporting prowess and the many famous side-steps past opposition forwards, or mazy runs from the wing at Belmore Oval. It's about a new chapter in his journey, one with a commercial focus.

Today, Chris Anderson is head of a national labour hire and training company he founded in 2014.

The boy from the bush, who grew up in the remote town of Condobolin south-west of Dubbo and drove trucks carrying 40-foot containers around Sydney's

wharves as a teenager, has come a long way.

Anderson Recruitment & Training was launched to provide skilled tradespeople to rail projects across NSW.

In a short time, it has expanded from four employees to 22 in corporate roles and dozens onsite, servicing large construction and infrastructure projects with operations in Sydney, Perth, Melbourne and Adelaide.

"The growth of the company is really satisfying, and much of the success can be attributed to a simple approach of focusing on people first and numbers second," Chris said.

"We care more than most about the wellbeing of our team, making sure the culture is right, and that they are supported and empowered to perform to the best of their abilities.

"These are the same fundamentals of a successful footy team – in business it just takes a little longer to germinate."

ART's first major accomplishment came when it was awarded a country rail contract by leading engineering contractor John Holland.

"That opportunity, a contract we've continued and expanded, set a platform to

establish our reputation as a serious player in the labour hire market," Chris said.

"More recently, we have won contracts with other national engineering and construction firms including Brookfield Multiplex and Downer Group.

"With Downer we have a really interesting project that leverages our football expertise to mentor young men who have been cut from professional rugby without playing first grade."

ART is responsible for finding, recruiting and managing a workforce of up to 40 young ex-league players, and putting them through a three-year Certificate III in Telecommunications.

"Professional rugby is ruthless with only 20 per cent of those who play in the junior academies going on to play first grade in the NRL," Chris said.

"This is a big issue for both the NRL and the broader community, with many of these guys suffering emotionally when their dreams of playing professional footy is cut short.

"The program we've established in partnership with Downer makes sure they don't fall through the cracks but have an

opportunity to gain viable qualifications to forge long and rewarding careers away from sport.”

ART is also proactive in helping indigenous Australians prosper in the workforce.

“Growing up in the bush, I saw first hand how employment can give purpose and direction to people,” Chris said.

“We have an interest in an indigenous employment company called Aspire that works to improve opportunities and skills for indigenous people seeking employment.

“Many government and commercial projects today include requirements, or at least a preference for, commitment to indigenous employment and through Aspire, we’re helping to fulfil that requirement and create good career opportunities for people.”

According to Chris, the company, which is headquartered in western Sydney in close proximity to some \$6.5bn in development projects planned for the region, still has much to achieve.

“At the moment, it’s an exciting time to be in Sydney, with construction projects like the second airport, lots of new universities going up, along with the billion



CHRIS ANDERSON, left, has located his business in Sydney’s west, close to major infrastructure projects.

Anderson as coach of the national team, above, and on the field at the height of his playing, below.



dollar Intermodal project,” he said.

“Regardless, we see the company having a national footprint within the next three years, with expansive contract portfolios in rail, construction and infrastructure.”

Chris is aware that on the surface, the transition from the elite level in sport to business may seem relatively easy to many outsiders.

“I suspect that some people might think that just because I reached the top in footy, doors open automatically for me in business,” he said.

“Well I can set the record straight and say that it’s just not that simple and to be fair, I’m actually glad it’s not.”

But the skills and values Chris mastered during the four decades he was involved in

football have come to the fore.

“Perseverance, belief, hard work – the traits we practiced week in, week out playing footy – are used today in growing our business,” Chris said.

The company has also embraced a family culture that Chris had instilled from his time at Canterbury.

Kevin Moore, Chris’s brother-in-law who also played and coached at Canterbury, is a Director, while his son Ben Anderson – an original player for the Melbourne Storm – is a project manager and niece Ceile Moore is part of the marketing team.

“We believe that a strong family influence through the business shows clients that we offer a more genuine service,” Chris said. “I think the family aspect adds something a little extra for clients, alongside our technical expertise.”

So as one year comes to an end and a new one approaches, what advice can Chris offer people running plumbing and other small to medium sized businesses?

“Bide your time, be persistent, and never give in – you just have to keep knocking on doors and forcing them open,” he says.

“Sure, with my name we often get welcomed in, but after that we’re like any other firm bidding on a contract.

“We have to earn the right and work hard. If you adopt a humble philosophy and embrace these values, there’s no reason why you won’t experience growth into the future.” 💧