

HAPPY ENDING

The life of Bryan is set to take a whole new twist in Wigan

BY TONY ADAMS

HIS NRL career is done and dusted, but Bryan Fletcher has no complaints, having ticked the final box in the same game that brought it all to a premature conclusion.

Fletcher had won a premiership, State of Origins and Test matches in a glittering nine-year career that had him, at one stage, **declared the best second-rower in the world.**

The only remaining goal was a win over his old club – the Sydney Roosters – and Fletcher achieved that in round 24, breaking his hand in the process.

"It's all over, but what a way to go out," Fletcher tells *RLW*. "That was *our* grand final, we hadn't beaten the Roosters in 11 years. That's longer than some of our fans have been alive, so it was something special."

At 31, Fletcher has opted to go the way of former Origin team-mates such as Mark Carroll, David Furner and David Peachey, opting to finish his career with a stint in England.

"I probably could have played another season next year . . . what would have killed me was another pre-season," says Fletcher, who has signed a two-year deal with Wigan.

"They are just too hard on the body as you get older – another one would have finished me."

Fletcher admits that he was lucky to play NRL football at all, let alone make it to the top of the heap.

"Ten years ago I never thought I'd play first grade, even when I joined the Roosters," the former Paddington Colts junior says.

"I was a good-time boy . . . I was too interested in having fun.

"I was working as a plumber in David Jones at night after training and never had any great ambition . . . it took

some stern words from (former Roosters reserve grade coach) Joe Thomas to sort me out.

"He saw some potential and told me a few home truths," Fletcher says. "He told me I was young and stupid but eventually I would start to think about financial security, a wife, kids . . . it made me wake up to myself and have a real go and I was surprised at how far I went."

The other man Fletcher owes much of his success to is Lebanese-born "healer" Robert Dehn, who fixed a chronic back problem five years ago when doctors, physios and surgeons had given his career up for dead.

"The back was gone – nothing could help it," Fletcher says. "Then this journo recommended this bloke and I still don't know how he did it, but he fixed it just by touch.

"I still go back to him every few months for a 'tune-up.'"

Born and bred in Sydney's east, Fletcher knows he will miss the sun and the sand but he is determined to arrive in Wigan with a positive attitude.

"Everyone complains about the weather but my wife and I are determined to go there with an open mind," he says.

A popular, easygoing figure, Fletcher was in danger of being remembered for all the wrong reasons after his racial slur against Parramatta's Aboriginal forward Dean Widders in round 17.

But the pair have shown that out of something bad, plenty of good can still emerge.

"We have set up a foundation for young kids out of the money Fletch was fined," Widders says.

"The two of us have set it up and hopefully it will help a lot of youngsters from troubled backgrounds who want to make it in league."

GLORY DAYS:
Fletcher tasted grand final success in 2002.



MR 100 PER CENT:
Fletcher gave the Bunnies brilliant service during his three seasons at the club.

CAMERON SPENCER/GETTY IMAGES

WIN! SENSATIONAL GRAND FINAL PACKAGE . . .

HOW would you like to be part of the rugby league's biggest day, starting with the grand final lunch at St George Leagues Club then on to Telstra Stadium for the NRL decider? Thanks to *RLW* you can be there on Sunday, October 2, to be part of the magic of grand final day. Our sensational prize includes:

- 2 Category One seats at Telstra Stadium for the NRL grand final
- 2 tickets for the grand final lunch at St George Leagues Club, including three-course meal and entertainment
- Transfer to the grand final from St George Leagues Club and return

These are the hottest tickets in town, and all you have to do win this amazing GRAND FINAL PACKAGE is tell us in 25 words or less: *Why you'd like to be part of rugby league's biggest day.*

Send your entries to *RLW* Grand Final Package, GPO Box 4088, Sydney NSW 2001 or email us at rlw@acp.com.au. Entries close on Friday, September 16, and the winner will be announced in our September 21 issue.

