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Once a Blue, always a Blue

By **Ross-John Bonaccorsi**
Community contribution / 8 hours, 14 minutes ago

From the Azzurri Blue to the Sky Blue, Federazione Italiana Rugby League (FIRL) and National Rugby League (NRL) stars James Tedesco and Paul Vaughan were instrumental in helping NSW secure a victory in this year's state-of-origin series.



James Tedesco of the Blues evades a tackle from Josh Papalii of the Maroons during the 2019 State of Origin series. (Photo: AAP)

It was the first time NSW has won the series back-to-back since 2005. What made it extra special was being at the ground with my fellow Blues witnessing both Vaughan and Tedesco "cross the white stripe", with the latter scoring the series-winning try on the final play!

It resembled a true climatic *Game of Thrones* moment (pre season eight).

Seeing Vaughan and Tedesco thrive in their rugby league journeys to date has been a real pleasure to follow, particularly given that the springboard to their well-earned success was playing for their Italian heritage.

On behalf of the Italian and Italo-Australian communities, we will always be thankful for their contribution in helping the growth and development of Italian rugby league.

Rather than harbouring a feeling of disappointment or despair following their transition from one shade of blue to another (and green and gold), there's a genuine sense of pride and honour in having two bonafide NRL superstars representing us every time they step onto the field, regardless of the jersey worn.

Like with most things, it would be wrong to begrudge someone for utilising their talents and trying to be the best they can be.

So with that said we will always support our *fratelli* (brothers) and wish them every success - once a Blue, always a Blue.

As mentioned [previously](#), the NRL and the English Super League have tremendous Italian talent on display, for example, Parramatta Eels enforcers Nathan Brown and Daniel Alvaro, and Hull FC's Mark Minichello.

Mark Minichello (older brother of Anthony Minichello, another Italian superstar fullback who also played for NSW and Australia) recently announced his retirement from rugby league for the end of 2019.

Mark has been a true gladiator of the sport spanning more than 18 years and over 400 first grade games.

This accomplishment has seen him join an exclusive club featuring members such as Australian legend and soon-to-be immortal Cameron Smith, and England warhorse James Graham.

Truly amazing!

While his upcoming retirement will perhaps cause us to feel blue, the legacy he has set while wearing the Azzurri Blue will forever be remembered and celebrated by the Italian rugby league community (and so will the achievements of his brother Anthony).

Until then, we're excited to see Mark finish his illustrious career on a high!

Grazie per i ricordi (Thanks for the memories)!

Reflecting on above, the optimist in me is reminded of inventor Alexander Graham Bell's famous saying: "When one door closes, another opens."

Hopefully the current crop of Italian rugby league players draw upon this wisdom, and like catching a ball, seize their opportunity to represent their culture with both hands!

Furthermore, for those who have the honour and privilege of donning the famous Azzurri jersey, they should refer to the example set by previous Italian rugby league champions for inspiration.

While it is difficult, perhaps almost impossible, to replace the star-studded talent that has represented us in recent years, having the "new age" of Italian rugby league stars coming through the pipeline will ensure the future remains bright!

A significant moment for Italian rugby league will be upon us later in the year.

The qualifiers for the [2021 Rugby League World Cup](#) are coming up.

Make no mistake, anything less than a successful qualifying campaign would be a major setback with the positive momentum generated in recent years coming to a grinding halt.

This sense of pressure and expectation is well recognised by the FIRL squad and coaching staff who have been working hard behind the scenes to prepare for these upcoming fixtures.

On a positive note, should Italy qualify for the 2021 tournament, this would be their third consecutive World Cup appearance which would solidify their strong standing within the international rugby league community.

As was the case for the 2017 tournament, hundreds of Italians and Italo-Australians will have the opportunity on Friday, September 6 2019, to attend the World Cup Qualifying Dinner at Club Marconi, with special guests including NRL stars past and present.

It's a special evening where fans can show support and help ensure the squad carries their passion into each of their qualifying games and beyond!

Visit [FIRLA's website](#) for more information.

Forza Azzurri! Forza Italia! Forza Rugby League!

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James Tedesco of the Blues evades a tackle from Josh Papalii of the Maroons during the 2019 State of Origin series. (Photo: AAP)

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Italian News / Lazio leader
murdered in Rome park

The leader of Lazio's "ultra" fan group was shot in the head and killed in a Rome park in broad daylight on Wednesday, Italian media reported.

Sport / Once a Blue, always a Blue

Federazione Italiana Rugby League (FIRL) and National Rugby League (NRL) stars James Tedesco and Paul Vaughan were instrumental in helping NSW secure a victory in this year's state-of-origin series.

Italian News / Dozens evacuated
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At least 80 people had to be evacuated from mountain areas above Italy's Lake Como after severe storms triggered mudslides and flash flooding, firefighters said.

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