



BRISBANE BRONCOS

GAINS: Ben Barba (Bulldogs), Martin Kennedy (Roosters), Todd Lowrie (Warriors), Daniel Vidot (Dragons), Stewart Mills (Sharks), Marmin Barba (Titans), Jon Green (Sharks).

LOSSES: Scott Prince (retired), Peter Wallace (Panthers), Corey Norman (Eels), Luke Capewell (Panthers), Lama Tasi (Salford Red Devils), Delroy Berryman (Sea Eagles), Kurt Baptiste (Raiders), Scott Anderson (Wakefield), Dunamis Lui (Sea Eagles).

OUR VIEW

Strengths: In addition to the high-profile signature of Ben Barba the Broncos have made some very handy acquisitions in Martin Kennedy, Todd Lowrie and Daniel Vidot which adds depth to some key areas.

Weaknesses: The halves pairing still remains something of a mystery following the departure of Peter Wallace and Scott Prince.

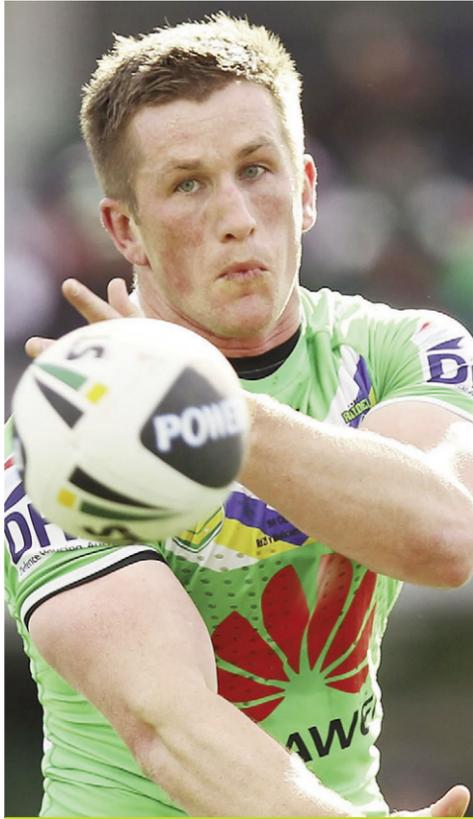
Prediction: 11th. Possibly higher if they come up with a winning halves combination.

THE DETAILS

Key player: Sam Thaiday. Relinquished captaincy to contribute more to the team... "I'll bust my butt and do everything that I can for the team this year."

The coach: Anthony Griffin will be hoping his off-season signings will fire early in the season and set the team up for top-eight finish. However if the two-preason thrashings the Broncos suffered are any indication Griffin's future at Red Hill looks grim.

The x-factor: The Broncos squad includes a raft of current Origin players, future Origin players and current England and New Zealand internationals. With so many stars the Broncos should be a certainty for the eight. However star-power counted for little last year when the Queenslanders ended up near the foot of the table.



CANBERRA RAIDERS

GAINS: Lagi Setu (Storm), Kyle O'Donnell (Panthers), Kurt Baptiste (Broncos).

LOSSES: Blake Ferguson (released), Joel Thompson (Dragons), Shaun Berrigan (retired), Sam Williams (Dragons), Joe Picker (Rabbitohs).

OUR VIEW

Strengths: The Raiders boast a formidable pack, with emerging Maroons wrecking ball Josh Papalii backed up by front-rowers David Shillington, Tom Learoyd-Lahrs and Brett White - all of whom have Origin experience.

Weaknesses: With Josh McCrone moving to hooker, the Raiders are auditioning youngsters to partner Terry Campese in the halves, and getting that combination firing may take some time.

Prediction: 14th. Stuart might need a season or two to develop a consistent winning culture.

THE DETAILS

Key player: Shaun Fensom. Having such a tireless defender in the middle - especially one who can churn out 100 metres per game with the odd line break and offload - is a huge asset.

The coach: Ricky Stuart arrives at Raiders HQ after a disastrous term at Parramatta and an unsuccessful stint as coach of NSW. He may not have had the happiest of years in the blue and gold last season but as a Raiders legend he should have no trouble inspiring his new charges, or getting them to buy into a fresh start for the club.

The x-factor: With recently debuted players such as Jack Wighton and Mark Nicholls to be joined in the top squad by prospective NRL talents including the likes of Mitch Cornish and Jack Ahearn in 2014, not to mention last year's breakout prop Paul Vaughan, Canberra's talent breeding ground has been a fertile source of NRL talent for the Green Machine in recent years.



CANTERBURY-BANKSTOWN BULLDOGS

GAINS: Reni Maitua (Eels), Chase Stanley (Dragons), Pat O'Hanlon (Eels), Kayne Brennan (Dragons), Damien Cook (Dragons), Tyrone Phillips (Rabbitohs).

LOSSES: Ben Barba (Broncos), Dene Halatau (Wests Tigers), Steve Turner (retired), Martin Taupau (Wests Tigers), Danny Galea (Widnes Vikings), Kris Keating (Hull Kingston Rovers), Paul Carter (Titans), Leilani Latu (Panthers), Jack Littlejohn (Sea Eagles), Joel Romelo (Storm).

OUR VIEW

Strengths: The Des Hasler factor. Four grand finals in the past six years speaks for itself.

Weaknesses: Life after Ben Barba. The Bulldogs' performances declined noticeably last year when the champion fullback was out with injury.

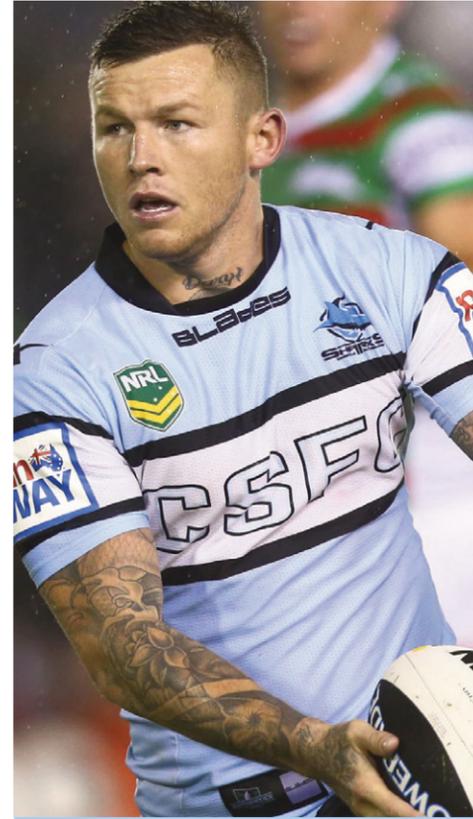
Prediction: 5th. Strength in all departments will see the 'Dogs be there or thereabouts come September.

THE DETAILS

Key player: With Barba gone, the slate is wiped clean and the birth of a new superstar, such as Josh Reynolds, awaits. Reynolds is a running five-eighth, the kind that takes half the defence to bring down after he's turned defenders inside out.

The coach: In a turbulent 2013, wily mentor Des Hasler - together with a strong management team - coaxed everything he could out of a squad that could've thrown in the towel at any point. Get rid of the dramas that engulfed the club last year, and watch Hasler weave more magic.

The x-factor: Without the likes of Sam Kasiano, Frank Pritchard and Graham for most of the first two months of 2013, the Bulldogs struggled to a 1-5 record over the first six weeks of the season. Now with the trio fit and firing - a strong start to the year beckons. Strong defensive framework is the key to the Dogs' title hopes in 2014.



CRONULLA SHARKS

GAINS: Blake Ayshford (Wests Tigers), Matt Prior (Dragons), Eric Grothe Jr (unattached), Daniel Holdsworth (Hull), Tinirau Arona (Roosters).

LOSSES: Jayson Bukuya (Warriors), Tyrone Peachey (Panthers), Ben Ross (retired), Mark Taufua (retired), Chad Townsend (Warriors), Stewart Mills (Broncos), Ben Pomeroy (Catalans Dragons), Jon Green (Broncos), Matthew Wright (Cowboys).

OUR VIEW

Strengths: Cronulla's yin and yang of Todd Carney and Jeff Robson is both underrated and dangerous. Another plus is the signing of former Tiger's centre Blake Ayshford.

Weaknesses: Off-field dramas involving coaching staff and some players. Any residual effect will harm the Sharks' title hopes.

Prediction: 7th. The Sharks have the depth to finish higher but too many uncertainties to tip a top-four finish with confidence.

THE DETAILS

Key player: It's difficult to recall a more rapid career ascent than the one Andrew Fifita managed with apparent ease at Cronulla in 2013. He finished as the NRL's top metre eater by the length of the straight (his 3,949 in 25 games was well clear of Brisbane lock Corey Parker's 3,456 in 22 games) and his average metres per match of 158 ranked second in the league - and it was only his club skipper Paul Gallen who finished ahead of him.

The coach: Former Manly and Northern Eagles mentor Peter Sharp's last head-coaching role was with Hull, who he left in 2008. Reluctantly takes over from Shane Flanagan who is serving a 12-month ban.

The x-factor: An all-star forward pack featuring skipper Paul Gallen, Andrew Fifita, Luke Lewis, Anthony Tupou and more depth offered by the evergreen Chris Heighington and Dragons recruit Matt Prior.



GO THE MIGHTY MAGPIES!

COWRA MAGPIES 2014 SEASON DRAW

• Bathurst Knockout March 14/15 @ Bathurst • Cyms under 18s Carnival March 8 @ Orange

APRIL 6 SPONSORS DAY • TRIAL GAME MARCH 22 COWRA V SOUTH CITY BULLS

Round 1: 6 April Cowra v LWC (Cowra Sponsors Day)
 Round 2: 13 April Panthers v Cowra
 Round 3: 27 April Cowra v Hawks
 Round 4: 4 May Cowra v Oberon
 Round 5: 11 May Mudgee v Cowra
 Round 6: 18 May Cowra v St Pats
 Round 7: 25 May Cyms v Cowra
 Round 8: 1 June Cowra - Bye
 Round 9: 15 June Blayney v Cowra

Round 10: 22 June LWC v Cowra
 Round 11: 29 June Cowra v Panthers
 Round 12: 6 July Hawks v Cowra
 Round 13: 13 July Oberon v Cowra
 Round 14: 20 July Cowra v Mudgee
 Round 15: 27 July St Pats v Cowra
 Round 16: 3 August... Cowra v Cyms
 Round 17: 10 August . Cowra Bye
 Round 18: 17 August . Cowra v Blayney

General Bye June 8 - Semis Aug 24 & 31 - Finals Sept 7 - Grand Final Sept 15