

NRL 2014 SEASON PREVIEW



NEWCASTLE KNIGHTS

GAINS: Clint Newton (Panthers), Michael Dobson (Hull Kingston Rovers).
LOSSES: Danny Buderus (retired), Neville Costigan (Hull Kingston Rovers), Kevin Naiqama (Panthers).

OUR VIEW
Strengths: One of the best backlines in the NRL, with terrific strike power out wide. The Knights boast a strong pack and, of course, one of the best coaches in the modern game.

Weaknesses: Injuries to key playmakers seem to haunt the Knights each season. In recent years Kurt Gidley has been sidelined with long-term injuries while this season Jarrod Mullen will be out of action for at least three months.

Prediction: 8th. Bennett factor should kick-in this year.

THE DETAILS

Key player: Kurt Gidley expected to fill-in for retired hooker Danny Buderus this season however the injury to Mullen means Gidley will lead the team around the park in partnership with Tyrone Roberts.

The coach: The best motivator in the business helped engineer a shock win over the Storm in Melbourne in the semi-finals last year and has a team with renewed confidence at his disposal this season. Bennett eats pressure for breakfast but the expectations are high that Bennett will deliver a premiership before he leaves the Knights at the end of 2015.

The x-factor: Once known for their razzle-dazzle style the Knights have become a rock-solid safety-first team under Wayne Bennett. They kept it simple by ignoring offloads (they threw the fewest of any team last season) which helped them control possession to the extent that they boasted the best completion rate in the league and the second-fewest errors of all teams.



NORTH QUEENSLAND COWBOYS

GAINS: Lachlan Coote (Panthers), Cameron King (Dragons), Hezron Murgha (Northern Pride), John Asiata (Roosters), Matthew Wright (Sharks).

LOSSES: Matt Bowen (Wigan), Dallas Johnson (retired), Ashley Graham (retired), Jayden Hodges (Sea Eagles), Felise Kaufusi (Storm).

OUR VIEW
Strengths: Star power. With Test props Matt Scott and James Tamou leading the way up front and superstar Johnathan Thurston calling the shots from behind.

Weaknesses: Depth in the back three. The Cowboys have not only lost favourite son Matt Bowen and his replacement Lachlan Coote (knee), but they've also farewelled wingers Ashley Graham, Wayne Ulugia and Kalifa Faifai Loa.

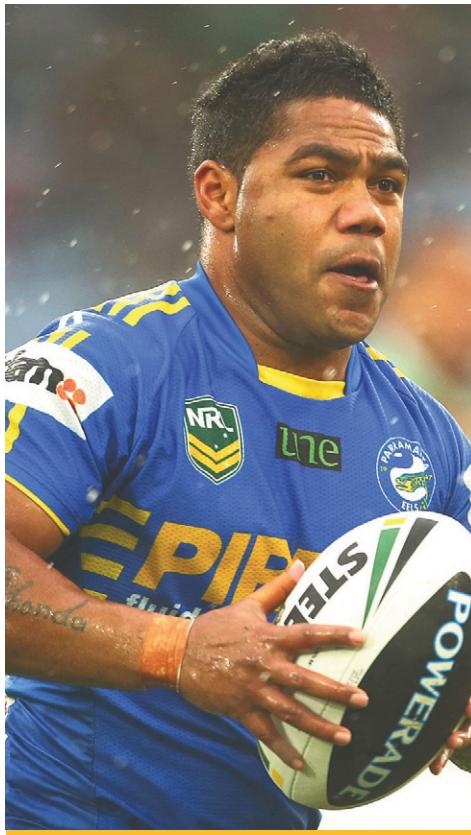
Prediction: 6th. The Cowboys have the forwards to make a top-four bid but rely too heavily on Thurston.

THE DETAILS

Key player: Following back-to-back broken legs, all league fans enjoyed seeing Tariq Sims play a full season in 2013 and a maiden Origin appearance with the Blues beckons if he can start 2014 in good fashion.

The coach: With Neil Henry shown the door at the end of 2013 the Cowboys are relying on former Queensland Origin rep Paul Green to lead the club to glory in 2014. Green coached Wynnum-Manly to back-to-back Queensland Cup titles in 2011-12 and in 2013 guided the Roosters under-20s to third in the minor premiership.

The x-factor: Since making 125 metres, nine tackle breaks and two line breaks in just his third top-grade appearance, the rugby league world has been waiting for Jason Taumao to explode. Has the potential to be a powerhouse contributor on a weekly basis.



PARRAMATTA EELS

GAINS: Will Hopoate (unattached), Lee Mossop (Wigan), Nathan Peats (Rabbitohs), Corey Norman (Broncos), Justin Hunt (Rabbitohs), David Gower (Sea Eagles), Brenden Santi (Wests Tigers), Toby Evans (Panthers), Evander Cummins (Dragons), Liam Foran (Salford), Ben Roberts (Storm).

LOSSES: Reni Maitua (Bulldogs), Cheyse Blair (Sea Eagles), Jake Mullaney (Salford Red Devils), Pat O'Hanlon (Bulldogs), Matt Keating (Burleigh Bears), Taulima Tautai (Wakefield), Matt Ryan (Wakefield).

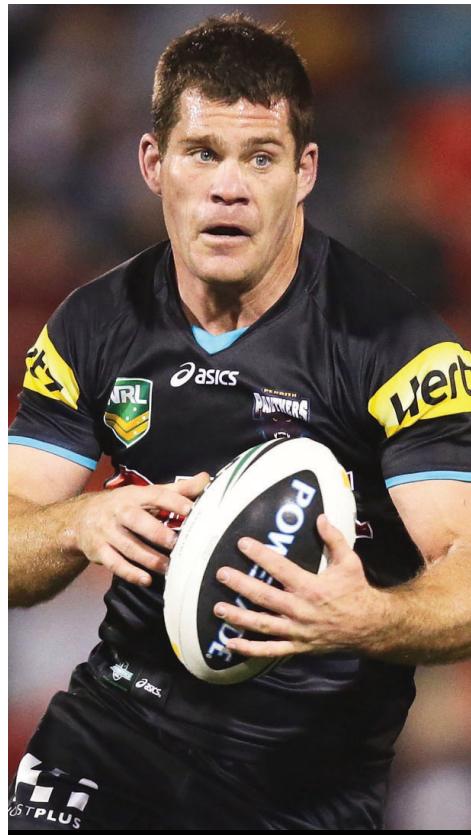
OUR VIEW
Strengths: Jarryd Hayne went to a new level at the Rugby League World Cup and Parramatta will be hoping his midas touch can see them out of the NRL cellar. **Weaknesses:** When you've claimed back-to-back wooden spoons, self-belief can be a problem. Week-in-week-out consistency will test the Eels. **Prediction:** 15th. Strong off-season recruitment should be enough for the Eels to avoid the spoon this season.

THE DETAILS

Key player: The return to the NRL of former Manly and NSW star Will Hopoate will add some serious firepower to the struggling Eels backline. In his last season, in 2011, Hopoate notched 14 tries and 14 line breaks in 19 games, and scored in his Origin debut.

The coach: New coach Brad Arthur is a home-grown product, a hit with the players and, with stints under Craig Bellamy and Geoff Toovey, arrives with a strong resume. His forte is discipline, which should be priority number one at Parramatta this year, making him an almost a perfect fit.

The x-factor: The Eels new halves combination of Chris Sandow and Corey Norman could be either the x-factor or the y-factor.... if they don't click Eels fans will be asking 'why' the team can't avoid yet another wooden spoon.



PENRITH PANTHERS

GAINS: Peter Wallace (Broncos), Jamie Soward (London Broncos), Elijah Taylor (Warriors), Brent Kite (Sea Eagles), Kevin Naiqama (Knights), Tyrone Peachey (Sharks), Shaun Spence (Wests Tigers), Will Smith (Knights), Leilani Latu (Bulldogs), Wellington Albert (Lae Tigers, PNG), Jamal Idris (Titans).

LOSSES: Lachlan Coote (Cowboys), Luke Walsh (St Helens), Mose Masoe (St Helens), Clint Newton (Knights), Danny Galea (Widnes Vikings), Travis Robinson (Storm), Brad Tighe (Titans).

OUR VIEW
Strengths: Outstanding talent in the outside backs, with tryscoring potential galore. Experience in the forwards with the addition of Elijah Taylor and Brent Kite. **Weaknesses:** Halves. Peter Wallace and Jamie Soward have tasted individual success before, but is their best behind them? **Prediction:** 10th. Could finish higher if the new halves combination fires.

THE DETAILS

Key player: Jamal Idris. Failed to reach his full potential on the Gold Coast, but back in Sydney and under the guidance of Ivan Cleary the former NSW star could explode.

The coach: After reaching the grand final with the Warriors in 2011, Panthers coach Ivan Cleary has done an admirable job in establishing a new culture at the foot of the mountains and it finally bore fruit last season. But now that he's been gifted with a more balanced roster, the bar has been raised and if they don't make the top eight this year, questions will be asked.

The x-factor: The new-look Panthers line-up includes former NSW Origin players Peter Wallace, Jamie Soward, Brent Kite and Jamal Idris; a fourth New Zealand representative in Elijah Taylor; and a couple of lively young guns in Kevin Naiqama and Tyrone Peachey.

OPEN FROM 5AM - 10PM 7 DAYS

NEW running★bare CLOTHING RANGE ARRIVING SOON

- BODY PUMP
- BODY BALANCE
- CXWORX
- BODY STEP

- GRIT SERIES
- KIMAX
- RPM

ALL
ROCKWEAR
CLOTHING
REDUCED TO
CLEAR

- LADIES SECTION
- PERSONAL TRAINING
- STRENGTH TRAINING

PROTEIN BARS & SUPPLEMENT POWDERS ALWAYS AVAILABLE.

101-103 Redfern St. 6342 6007

cowrafitness@bigpond.com.au



• **cowra** **healthclub**

RM2058419