



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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CONNELL, MR C

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (3.58 am): I rise to pay tribute to the late Cyril Connell, who passed away last week aged 81 years. Cyril's passing has meant the loss of a wonderful friend and mentor to many people and the end of the life of an extraordinary Queensland. Cyril was born in 1928 in Rockhampton. Cyril became a teacher and taught at several country schools in Central Queensland before transferring to Toowoomba in 1950. He retired from the education department in 1988, having reached the level of deputy director. In that time he had also been deputy headmaster of Brisbane State High from 1963 to 1964 and a regional director of education based in Roma from 1972 to 1974. In his time as a teacher, Cyril is credited with initiating programs to assist troubled youth and, in his second career, he worked tirelessly to assist young men to build better lives on and off the playing field. Cyril was a great educator and mentor because he genuinely listened to people, especially young people. There was no generation gap when Cyril was in a conversation.

Cyril became known outside the education department as a prominent rugby league player in country competitions during the 1950s. By 1952 Cyril was a Queensland half-back, a position he held for 24 matches against New South Wales. He also captained Queensland on seven occasions. In 1954 Cyril was selected as a reserve to play for Australia against Great Britain, finally making his run on debut for Australia against New Zealand in 1956. At the end of 1956 he was selected in the Australian Kangaroo touring squad to England and France.

Cyril continued to play until the early 1960s in Rockhampton, when he turned to coaching. He coached Rockhampton, with one of his players in that side being a future member, minister and Speaker of the Queensland parliament, now a former member, Kev Lingard. On one occasion I was privileged enough to have Cyril Connell as a guest of mine for lunch here at Parliament House in the Stranger's Dining Room, where Cyril told me a few stories about Kev Lingard from those days in Rockhampton.

After retiring from the education department, Cyril was recommended to Wayne Bennett for a role with the Broncos as a talent scout. The success of the Wayne Bennett-Cyril Connell partnership is well documented. Cyril's scouting resulted in many high-profile players coming to the Broncos as teenagers and going on to represent Queensland and Australia. One of the last players Cyril signed to the club before retiring was not a teenager but 24-year-old Palmer Wopau, a former student of Abergowrie College in my electorate of Hinchinbrook.

Cyril worked with the Broncos until 2008. One of the last roles he held in rugby league was as a member of the Queensland Rugby League History Committee. One of the other members of that committee, a constituent of mine and North Queensland Cowboys historian, Greg Shannon, has told me what an honour it was to serve with Cyril Connell. I did not know Cyril Connell well but, insofar as I was acquainted with him, I can say confidently that he will be sadly missed and fondly remembered as a stalwart of the great game of rugby league in Queensland. I offer my sympathies to his family.