

CASTLEFORD TIGERS

VISA WORLD CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP 1997

In the mid 1990s, the game of Rugby League was in a state of upheaval in Australia, as Kerry Packer's Optus Vision and Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation battled for the broadcasting rights and ultimately control of the top-level professional Rugby League in the Southern Hemisphere. During this time, several teams broke away from the Australian Rugby League (ARL) to form a separate competition called Superleague(SL) and in 1997 a World Club Championship competition was held between all the Superleague teams in Australia and Europe.

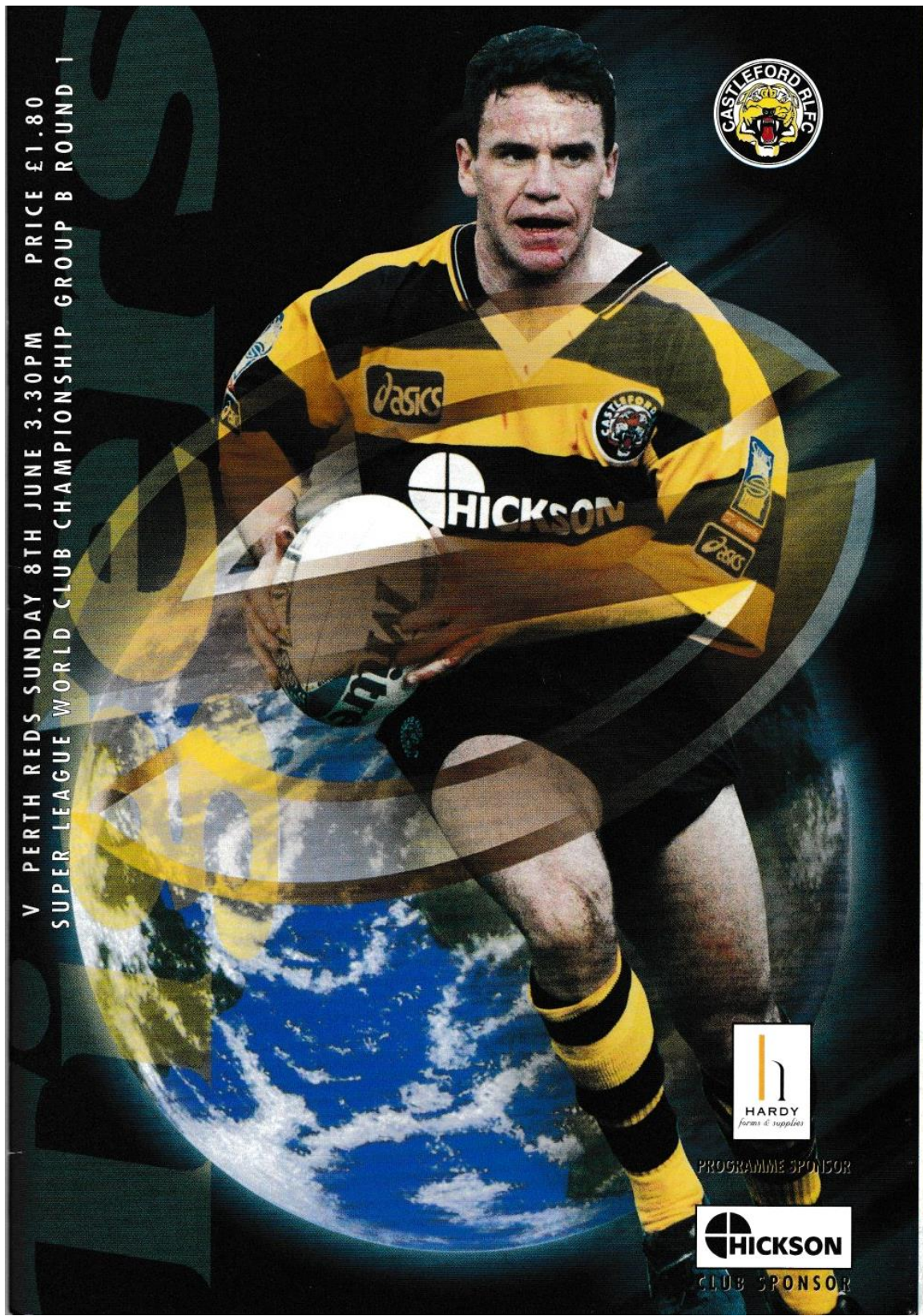
The games were played on a home and away basis with the top 6 teams in the European league each playing 3 teams from Australia and New Zealand. The other 6 teams playing 2 teams from Australia. The early matches were played in groups, the leading teams in each group then progressed to sudden death play-offs.

As Castleford Tigers were in the lower half of the League, they were selected to play 2 teams, Hunter Mariners and Perth Western Reds. These were newly created teams which existed for only a short period. Nevertheless, they did possess some very good players.

The competition was very expensive to run and was far from a success, with low attendances at the games and estimated financial losses of about 5 million Australian dollars. The Southern Hemisphere teams proved far too strong for their European counterparts and many matches were too one-sided to be competitive.

In **Round One**, Wigan were the only Northern Hemisphere team to win their match. In this round, **Castleford Tigers played Perth Western Reds** at Wheldon Road on 8 June 1997. The attendance was a disappointing 3590.

V PERTH REDS SUNDAY 8TH JUNE 3.30PM PRICE £1.80
SUPER LEAGUE WORLD CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP B ROUND 1



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Captain Mike Ford presents a memento to his opposite number from the recent World Club Championship Game against Perth Western Reds

Although Castleford lost the game, 16-24, they put up a good performance, compared to most of the other European teams. Having gone behind 18-0 in the first 30 minutes to tries by Peter Shiels, following a dazzling handling move, Jon Grieve from a pass close to the line by prop Robbie Kearn and stand-off Scott Wilson, following a break from half way by half-back partner Matt Rodwell, and 3 conversions by Chris Ryan, Castleford showed great guts and character to make a game of it. The fight back commenced with an unconverted try by Jason Critchley 5 minutes before half-time, following a strong run by Jason Lidden, to bring the scores to 4-18 at the break. A heavy storm early in the second half made conditions difficult for both teams, but Castleford adapted best and Ian Tonks ploughed through a posse of defenders to splash down for a try which he also converted. On 66 minutes, Castleford's Aussie centre David Chapman scored a try, converted by Danny Orr, to make the score 16-18 and it was game-on. However, Castleford's hopes were

eventually dashed when Matthew Rodwell finished off a break down the left wing which was converted by Chris Ryan.

Teams :- **Castleford Tigers**

Flowers; Roach, Critchley, Chapman, Smith; Vowles, Ford; Crooks (Lidden 22, Orr 57), Russell (Lidden 73), Sampson (Tonks 72), Schick, Tonks (Sykes), Tuuta (Crooks 69). Sub not used - Gay.

Tries: Critchley, Tonks, Chapman. Goals: Ryan (4).

Perth Western Reds

Fleming; Ryan, Bell, Horan, Daylight; Wilson(Geyer 46), Rodwell; Green (Kearns 63), Fuller, Kearns (Ridding 33), Shiels (Chapman 59), Grieve, Higgins (Evans 23).

Tries: Shiels, Grieve, Wilson, Rodwell. Goals: Ryan (4).

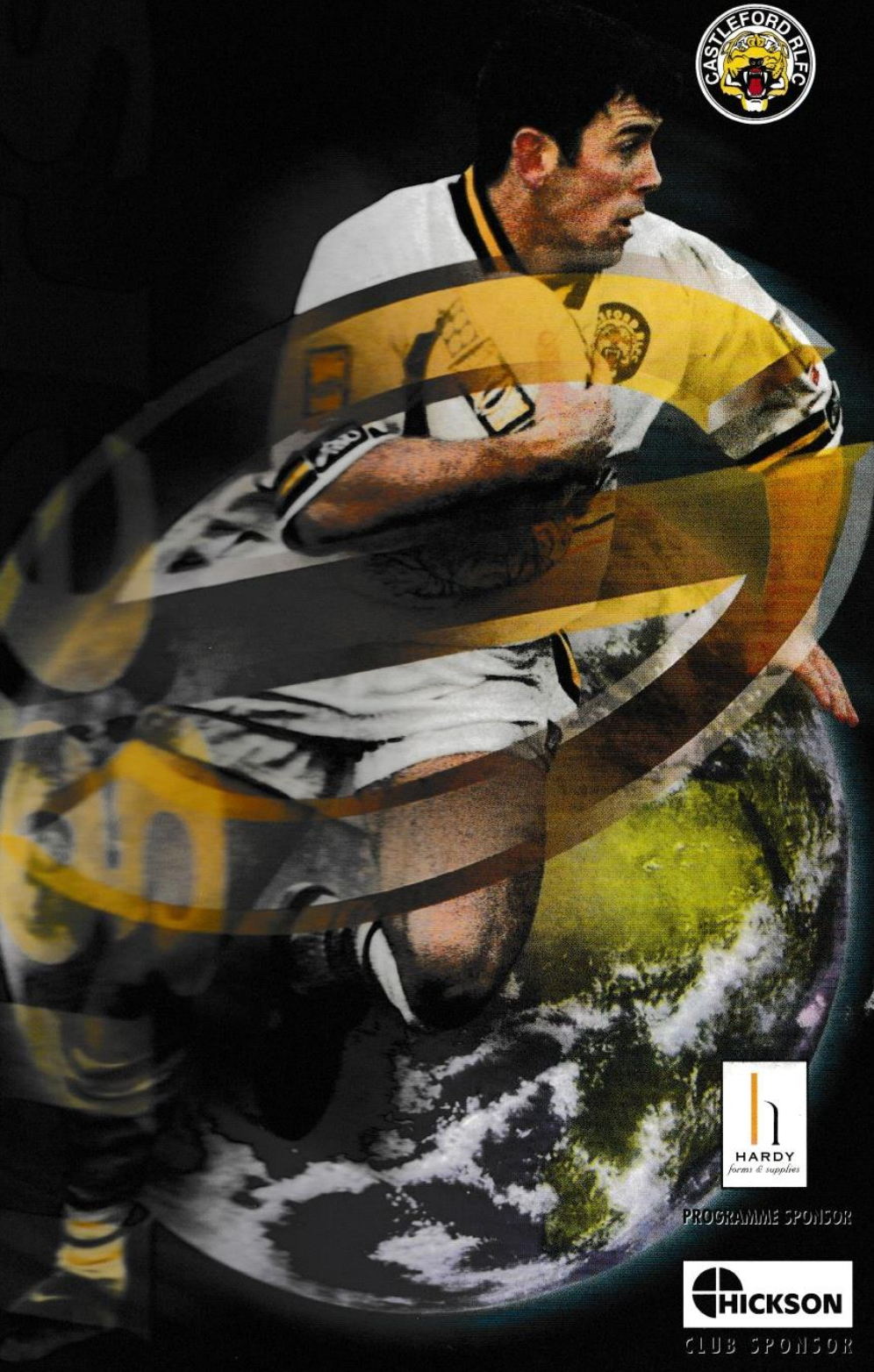
Referee: Robert Connolly

Score: Castleford Tigers **16 - 24** Perth Western Reds (Half-time 4 - 18)

The **Second Round** of matches saw a similar pattern of results, with only Sheffield Eagles, who beat Perth Western Reds 26-22, being successful against their Southern Hemisphere opponents.

Castleford Tigers played Hunter Mariners at Wheldon Road on 13 June 1997 in front of a crowd of only 3087 and were beaten convincingly.

V HUNTER MARINERS FRIDAY 13TH JUNE 7.30PM PRICE £1.80
SUPER LEAGUE WORLD CLUB CHAMPIONSHIP GROUP B ROUND 2



PROGRAMME SPONSOR



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Castleford got off to a good start when Andrew Schick scored a try on 8 minutes, powerering over on the left wing from a Brendan Tuuta pass. Lee Crooks failed with the conversion. Hunter Mariners replied with a superb try by Noel Goldthorpe, which he went on to convert, to make the score 4-6. Goldthorpe then put Tony Iro over 7 minutes later for another converted try. The Tigers got 2 points back with a penalty kick by Tonks, before the Mariners completed the scoring in the first half with a try by Hill. In the second half, Hunter Mariners got of to a whirlwind start, scoring 4 tries in the first 22 minutes as they tore the Tigers apart. The Tigers fought back with tries from Chris Smith, from a kick by Adrian Vowles and Mike Ford, following a magnificent effort by Dean Sampson who showed great strength to force himself to within a few inches of the try-line before shaking off 5 tacklers and slipping a pass to his half-back. Ford went on to show astonishing pace to beat the Mariners defence to his kick through to score the Tigers third try.

Teams:- **Castleford Tigers**

Flowers (Gay 28); Roach, Lidden (Crooks 61), Chapman, C Smith; Vowles, Ford; Sampson (Tuuta 74), Russell (Goddard 47), Crooks (Sykes 23), Schick, Tonks, Tuuta (Orr 47).

Tries: Schick, Smith, Ford.

Goals: Tonks (1).

Hunter Mariners

Ross; Thompson, Godden, K Iro (Marquet 72), Carlaw; Hill, Goldthorpe; Maddison (Brann 40), Kimmorley, Stone (T Iro 61), T Iro (Doherty 49), Marquet (Piccinelli 49), Poching. Sub not used Beauchamp.

Tries: Carlaw (2), Ross (2), Goldthorpe, Hill, T Iro, Stone.

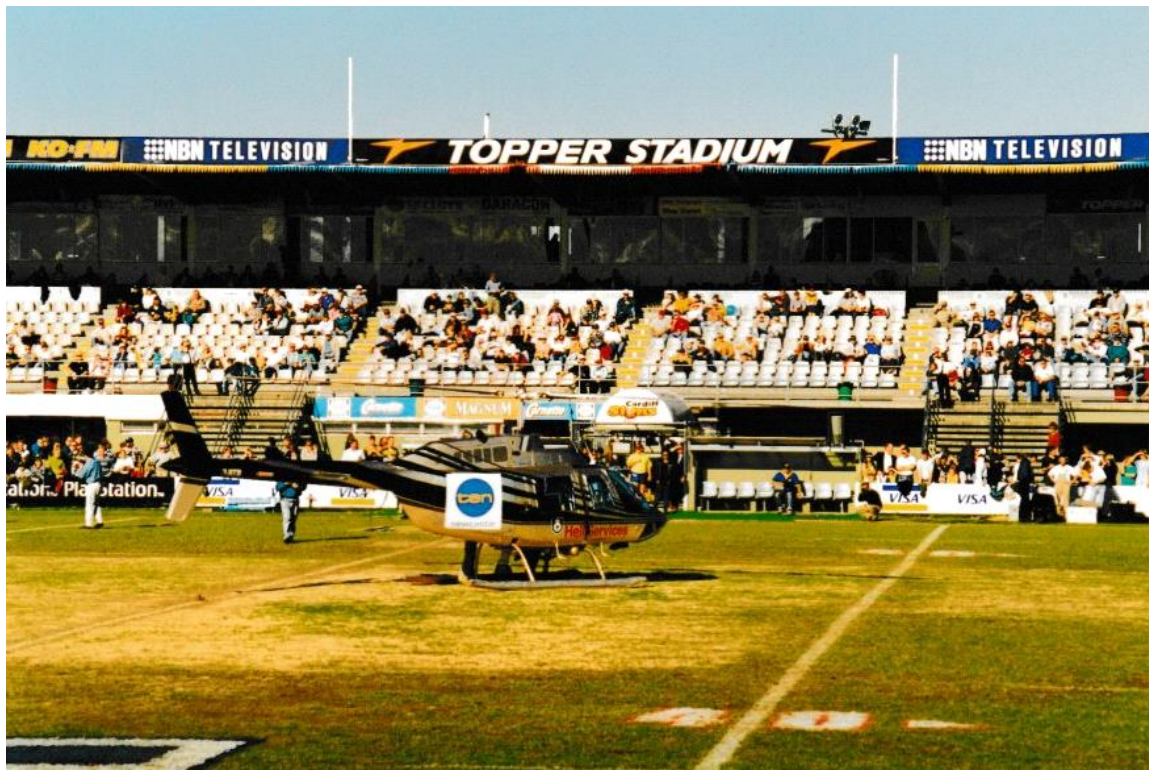
Goals: Goldthorpe (5).

Referee: Stuart Cummins

Score: Castleford Tigers **14 - 42** Hunter Mariners (HT 6 - 16).

The Tigers did not have a match in **Round 3**. This Round once again saw the Southern Hemisphere teams dominate, winning all but one of the games. Perth Western Reds were the odd ones out, losing to Paris St Germain 0-24 in Paris.

Round 4 saw Castleford Tigers travel to Australia to create history for the Club, by playing their first ever match in the Southern Hemisphere on 20 July 1997 at the Topper Stadium, Newcastle against Hunter Mariners. The Mariners were undefeated at this stage in the Competition and represented a stern test for the Tigers. The attendance was once again disappointingly low at 3379, but the Tigers gave a much improved performance than in their home games.





The Tigers were unlucky not to go ahead early in the game when Mike Ford collected his own kick to send Danny Orr streaking for the posts, only for the referee Tim Mander to harshly rule a forward pass. Moments later, the Mariners went ahead when a speculative pass from Kevin Iro bounced favourably for winger John Carlaw. The Mariners lead was extended when Keith Beauchamp benefitted from a long floated pass by Cliff Hill to go over in the corner. The Tigers responded when Chris Smith sprinted 30 yards to score, following a sweeping move down the let flank to make the score 8-4, but just before the break, the Mariners scored 2 quick tries. The first when the Iro brothers combined to send in Beauchamp for his brace and Carlaw, also scored his second. Noel Goldthorpe kicked his first and only goal of the match to send the teams into a 18-4 half-time lead. The Tigers defended stoutly in the second half, scrambling well to support their team-mates. However, the Mariners went further ahead when Kevin Iro scored a simple try following a kick, when Richard Gay and Jason Roach were blinded by the bright sunlight and failed to deal with the high ball. The Tigers refused to give in and hit back when a thumping tackle by Brad Davis on Robbie McCormack, freed the ball for Danny Orr to send in Jason Critchley for a well

deserved try. Danny Orr was substituted following an heroic effort, and with Mike Ford already off the field with a hamstring injury, the Tigers chances of victory disappeared. Just before the final whistle, Tony Iro completed the scoring with a close range try to leave the Tigers without a win in their 3 games.

The Mariner's coach, Graham Murray, commenting after the match said, "Castleford have improved tremendously since we played them over there. They scored a couple of good tries against us and their defence was excellent".

Teams: **Castleford Tigers**

Jason Flowers; Richard Gay, Adrian Vowles, Chris Smith, Jason Critchley; Brad Davis, Mike Ford (Jason Roach 52); Dean Sampson (Richard McKell 67), Danny Orr (Richard Russell 60), Richard McKell (Nathan Sykes 26), Jason Lidden, Andrew Schick (Lee Harland 71), Lee Harland (Brendan Tuuta 30).

Tries: Smith (25), Critchley (60).

Hunter Mariners

Robbie Ross; Keith Beauchamp, Kevin Iro, Brad Godden (Nick Zisti 26), John Carlaw; Scott Hill, Noel Goldthorpe; Troy Stone (Tony Iro 13), Robbie McCormack (Richard Swain 60), Anthony Brann (Troy Stone 29), Paul Marquet, Darrien Doherty (Anthony Brann 68), Neil Piccinelli (Tyran Smith 40).

Tries: Carlaw (15, 35), Beauchamp (20, 31), Kevin Iro (36), Tony Iro (78).

Goal: Goldthorpe

Referee: Tim Mander

Final Score: Hunter Mariners **26 - 8** Castleford Tigers (HT 18 - 4)

In the other matches in Round 4, three English teams were successful. Leeds beat Adelaide Rams 22-14, Oldham beat North Queensland Crushers 20-16 and London beat Canberra Raiders 38-18.

In Round 5, Castleford Tigers played Perth Western Reds at the WACA cricket ground on 27 July 1997, in front of a crowd of 6114.

Perth were fortunate to score first when Shaun Devine followed up a high kick, which bounced off Brendan Tuuta into his hands, in front of the posts, for a simple touch down. Devine converted his own try to give the home side a 6 point lead. The Reds went further ahead when Mark Geyer scored under the posts from another "up and under" by his brother Matt. The try was again converted by Shaun Devine. The lead was further increased to 14-0 when Devine kicked a penalty. The Tigers thought they had pulled a try back when a strong tackle by Dean Sampson forced the ball loose and Graham Steadman sprinted away, only for the referee to call him back for a knock on in the tackle by Sampson. Matt Geyer scored the final try of the first half from a lovely flicked pass from John Wilshere. Shaun Devine was again successful with the conversion to put Perth in front 20-0. The score certainly didn't reflect the hard work the Tigers had put into the first half.

Early in the second half Perth went a man down when Peter Shiels was dismissed for kicking out at Lee Harland. The Tigers made their numerical advantage pay with a try from Jason Roache, following a chip-kick by Graham Steadman, who also converted to bring the score to 20-6. Lee Harland was then penalised for off-side and Devine made no mistake with the conversion to extend Perth's lead to 22-6. This did not deter Castleford who fought back with 2 further tries. One by Jason Flowers, off a brilliant flick by Danny Orr and another by Jason Critchley, off a charge-down by Jason Lidden. Unfortunately, neither try was converted, although the first attempt did hit the post. The score was now 22-14, but despite a valient effort by the Tigers, they could not add to their score. Perth completed the scoring with another penalty by Devine.

Castleford Tigers could hold their heads up high following a very good performance in which they had matched their opponents for large parts of the game. Unfortunately, the bounce of the ball and luck had not been in their favour, otherwise they could easily have ended the competition with a win.

Teams: **Castleford Tigers**

Richard Gay; Chris Smith, Jason Roach, Adrian Vowles, Jason Critchley; Graham Steadman, Mike Ford; Nathan Sykes, Richard Russell, Richard McKell, Lee Harland, Grant Anderson, Brendan Tuuta. Subs Dean Sampson, Jason Lidden, Danny Orr, Jason Flowers.

Tries: Jason Critchley, Jason Flowers, Jason Roach.

Goals: Graham Steadman (1).

Perth Western Reds

Matthew Geyer; Tristan Brady-Smith, Greg Fleming, Chris Ryan, John Wilshere; Shaun Devine, Matthew Rodwell; Corrin Riddings, Matthew Fuller, Brett Green, Wayne Evans, Darren Higgins, Jared Millar. Subs Mark Geyer, Peter Shiels, Fred Sapatu, Damian Chapman.

Tries: Shaun Devine, Mark Geyer (2).

Goals: Shaun Devine (6)

Sent Off: Peter Shiels.

Referee: Brian Grant.

Final score: Perth Western Reds **24 - 14** Castleford Tigers (HT 20 - 0)

Wigan were the only European side to win in Round 5, beating Canterbury 31 - 24 and **Round 6** saw only Salford win, beating Adelaide Rams 14 - 12.

In the **Quarter-finals**, the remaining European Clubs, Bradford Bulls, Wigan, St Helens and London were all defeated, leaving only Southern Hemisphere teams to contest the semi-finals.

The **Semi-final** results were as follows:

10 Oct 1997 Brisbane 22 Auckland 16 at
Brisbane Att 9686

11 Oct 1997 Cronulla 18 Hunter Mariners 22 at Sydney
Att 5214

Final

The eventual winner of the Competition was Brisbane Broncos who beat Hunter Mariners in the Final at Ericsson Stadium, Auckland by a score of 36 - 12, in front of a crowd of 10,300. Brisbane had gone through the tournament undefeated, so were rightly crowned Champions. Hunter Mariners, who had exceeded all expectations, proved to be a one season wonder, as they were disbanded at the end of the 1997 season.

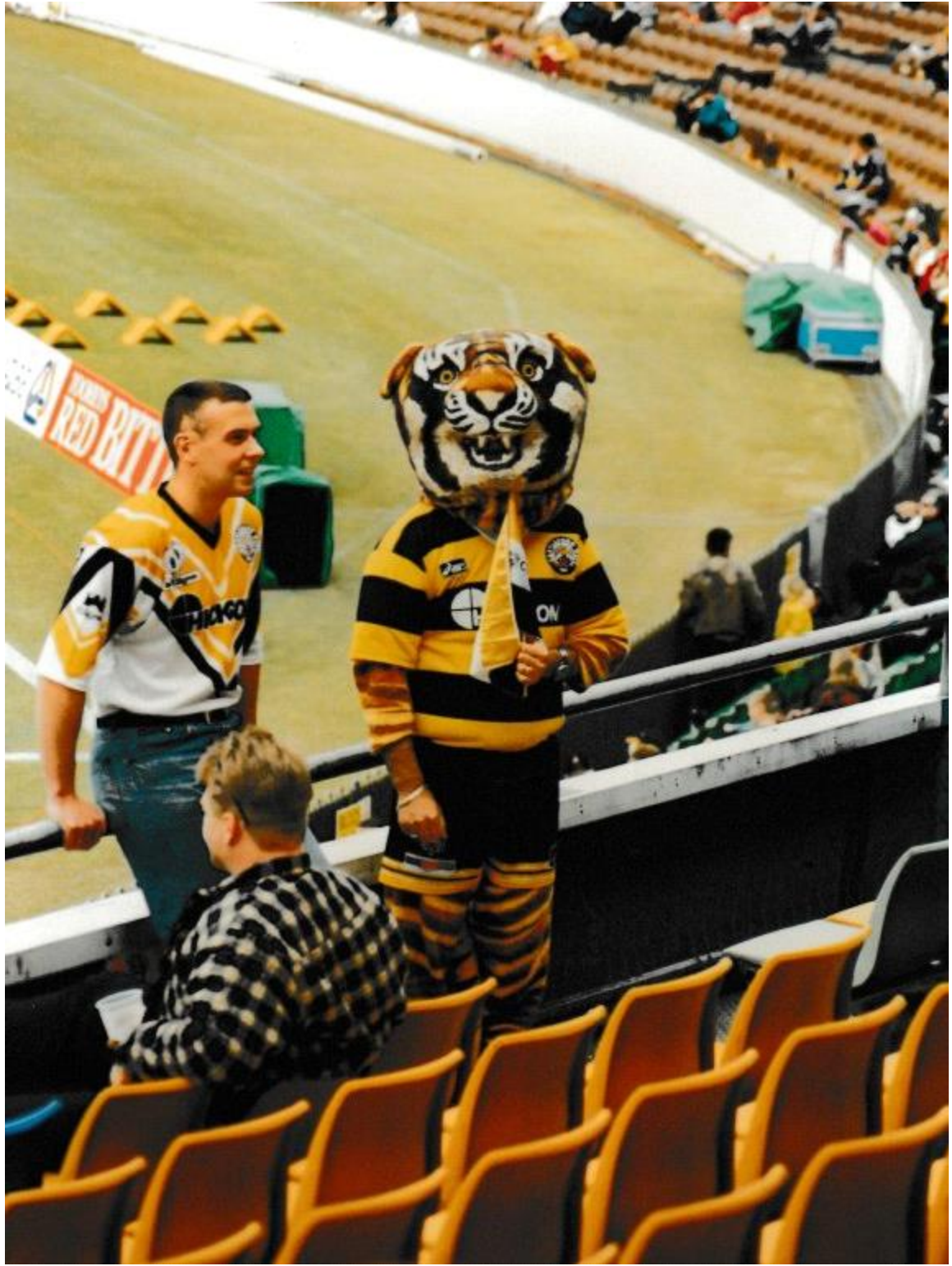
PERSONAL MEMORIES OF THE TRIP TO AUSTRALIA WITH THE CASTLEFORD TIGERS SUPPORTERS IN 1997.

1. The Mascot

I have supported Castleford Tigers RLFC all my life (over 60 years) and ever since Castleford centre three-quarter Peter Small was selected to tour with the Great Britian Lions in 1962, I had dreamed of travelling to Australia to watch rugby league. I had anticipated that I would be watching a British touring team playing in Australia, but in 1997, I not only full-filled my dream of watching rugby in Australia, but incredibly was able to watch my own team play there. A small group of Castleford supporters travelled on the trip, organised by Peter Banner, accompanied by Mick Morgan as tour leader.



When we arrived in Australia I asked Mick if the team had brought the club mascot suit, as I would love to lead the team onto the field. Unfortunately, Mick said no, which was a great disappointment. However, the matter did not rest there. On the morning before the match against Perth Western Reds, it was agreed that all the supporters would go down into town and return in time to get ready for the game. It soon became apparent that this was a ruse to get me out of the hotel, because when I returned to my room to get ready I found a tiger mascot costume laying on the bed. The rest of the group had clubbed together to rent the costume for the day, so that I could live my dream.



Although I was not allowed to lead the team onto the field, as I was not the official mascot, I loved the attention I attracted from the Australian fans and did my best to encourage the crowd in the stand, before and during the game. After the match ended, the Perth players remained on the pitch to allow the children in the crowd to obtain autographs. However, as soon as the youngsters spotted me in my tiger costume at the pitch-side, they left the players and queued up for my autograph instead. I will never forget the thrill of signing their shirts and autograph books "Terry the Tiger".



2. Memorabilia

During the tour, all the Castleford Tigers players wore a special team polo shirt. It was black with the team logo and "World Club Championship 1997" printed in gold lettering across the front. Just before we left the hotel to return home from Perth, a knock on the room door attracted my attention. When I opened the door, Danny Orr was standing there and handed me his team polo shirt (which I still possess). Bearing in mind that this was the first season Danny had played in the

first team and the first time Castleford had played in Australia, or the World Club Championship, I was elated, and honoured to receive the shirt from him. Danny's generosity will never be forgotten and shows what a great clubman he was and still is.

Ron Booth

Castleford Tigers Heritage Group Volunteer (2016).