

THE MIDAS TOUCH KICKS IN FOR TOM

CHRIS GARRY

ONE rugby league fanatic's punt on a backyard game he invented with university mates has created a sporting revolution.

In the space of eight years, Tom Longworth's Touch Rugby League creation has boomed from a Sunday catch-up with friends to one of Queensland's biggest social sports.

TRL is pushing touch football for popularity in southeast Queensland and despite the NRL recently formally recognising traditional touch as its non-contact cousin, TRL has rapidly expanded and even gained a foothold in Sydney.

This year alone more than 1000 teams played TRL, which is not bad considering it was started by a bloke who just wanted to play a game of touch where he could kick the ball.

"It came about from just being with a bunch of mates on a Sunday and modifying the rules of touch to suit our needs and create a game that we wanted to play," Longworth (pictured) said. "Over time we tweaked things and then we

formally kicked off in 2005.

"At that time we already had eight teams who wanted to play so we just set up a proper competition.

"It was a social competition. It grew organically. There was no advertising, just word of mouth.

"There were no commercial reasons to set TRL up. I was very naive and only charged what was needed to cover costs at the start and even it didn't cover costs.

"When it got to the point of having 40 teams ... reality sunk in and we thought this could be something bigger and we could have 100 teams in Brisbane.

"Now we are in Sydney, the Gold Coast and this year alone we had 1000 teams play in our competitions.

"I never thought I would be doing this today. It was something I fell into."

The rules of TRL allow for a kick on any tackle and the ball must be played as it is in rugby league with a foot touching the ball.

This slows the play down to force greater tactics and creativity than traditional touch football.



MANLY BOY: Coach Geoff Toovey is getting results.

Toovey close to signing contract

DAVID RICCIO

MANLY'S boardroom war has had little impact on Geoff Toovey, with the head coach on the verge of extending his future at Brookvale until at least 2016.

The Sea Eagles were hoping to announce the new deal last Friday, but instead Toovey spent this weekend going over the terms of the deal which will keep him at the club he has already spent a remarkable 24 years with, both as a first grade player and an NRL coach, for at least a further two seasons.

Toovey's new deal will provide the ultimate Christmas cheer for members and fans who have been left stuck in the middle of an ugly boardroom battle for control of the Manly District Football Club.

It was at last Thursday's annual general meeting that Manly chief executive David Perry provided an update on negotiations with Toovey to the football club board, which the members decided to retain at the ballot box.

Despite some discussion within the room last Thursday night that St George Illawarra were interested in Toovey, Perry informed the directors that after two months of negotiations with the head coach, a deal was imminent.

In just his second NRL season at the helm of the Sea Eagles after taking over from Des Hasler, Toovey's nous to steer a battered and bruised Manly side into last year's grand final was revered even by their most spiteful rivals.

The performance and character which Toovey drove out of his players led rugby league immortal and club legend Bob Fulton to champion the signing of Toovey to an extended deal.

The Wests Tigers' Mick Potter, New Zealand Warriors Matt Elliott, South Sydney's Michael Maguire and Cronulla's Shane Flanagan are all off-contract with their respective clubs in 2014.

Dragons coach Steve Price is in a unique situation where the club has an option to keep him on-board for 2015, or sever ties with the 36-year-old at the end of the 2014 season.

Tyson's about face

CHRIS GARRY

IN A reversal of rugby league stereotypes, boxing has delivered Mackay prop Tyson Andrews an unlikely NRL opportunity three years after he quit the sport.

With a first name of Tyson, the 23-year-old Brisbane Broncos junior was always bound for a pugilism career.

However it was a year spent as a boxer in 2010 that reignited his passion for the 13-man code, a desire culled when he was unwanted after his National Youth Competition career finished.

Now he is impressing Manly Sea Eagles coaches with his pre-season training efforts after signing a two-year deal with the club.

Andrews was relegated to rugby league's scrapheap at the end of 2009 when the



OUT OF THE RING: New Sea Eagles prop Tyson Andrews is a former Australian amateur boxing champion.

Broncos did not renew his contract and there was little interest elsewhere.

The feeling of rejection left him frustrated with the sport. So he quit to become a boxer, a sport he had dabbled in growing up on the Sunshine Coast.

Within the space of a year he won the Australian heavyweight amateur title but more importantly rediscovered his passion for league.

"I wasn't in a good place after the under-20s finished," Andrews said.

"I just didn't want to play rugby league. I didn't think I was good enough.

"When there wasn't interest I thought that's it, my dream is over and I will never play in the NRL.

"The Broncos were always good to me so there are no hard feelings there. I just needed to clear my head.

"So I just thought I would give boxing a go."

He did more than that. He was undefeated and contemplated making the Olympics his next goal.

But there was always a voice in the back of his head reminding him rugby league was his first love. So in 2011 he started from the bottom.

He turned up to train with local Mackay side Wests and impressed the coaching staff of Intrust Super Cup team the Mackay Cutters.

An offer to train with the Cutters in the pre-season turned into a full-time contract.

Last season his performances attracted the Sea Eagles who needed to boost their front-row depth.

"The year off was great for me and it cleared my head," Andrews said.

"I didn't want to be left with regrets about rugby league."

With Manly's cult hero George Rose moving to the Melbourne Storm there is a front row spot to be filled at Manly.

Manly has had recent success turning fringe forwards into regular first graders with Brenton Lawrence and Justin Horo having breakout seasons in 2013.

"Seeing how those guys performed at Manly was a big attraction for me to come here and I'm loving it," Andrews said.