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SPORT



AROUND THE GROUNDS

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HOOPOO IN HOSPITAL

Jockey undergoes spinal operation after horror race fall

By **TONY MCMAHON**
Rockhampton Morning Bulletin

HORSE RACING: The diagnosis for fallen jockey Darryl Johnston remains unclear after he underwent a seven-and-a-half-hour spinal operation at the Princess Alexandra Hospital in Brisbane on Sunday.

Less than 24 hours earlier, the Mackay-based hoop fractured two vertebrae in

his back and damaged his spinal chord in a race fall from his mount Easy Harmony at Rockhampton's Callaghan Park racecourse. He was flown to Brisbane on Saturday night in preparation for marathon surgery.

From a bedside vigil in the hospital's intensive care ward mid-afternoon on Monday the young jockey's mother Cheryl said her son

had just been brought out of a 24 hours induced coma.

"The doctors plated and screwed the two broken vertebrae during the operation but Darryl was suffering from severe swelling. He had to be put on oxygen and because of all the swelling, there was too much so it could not be determined whether he had severed his spinal chord or not. It is just

a waiting game now to find out," Cheryl Johnston said.

Johnston, 23, lost movement in his lower body as a consequence of the fall.

"It is just too early and unclear yet to say what will happen," she said.

It was hoped that Darryl would be moved out of intensive care yesterday and transferred to the spinal ward of the hospital.

"It is just too early and unclear yet to say what will happen"

Johnston took all before him as a champion apprentice jockey in Rockhampton where because of his height, he had to endure severe weight restrictions throughout his career.

A former Rockhampton jockey, he transferred to Mackay making a successful comeback to race riding after being sidelined for some months with a fractured wrist from a five-horse race fall. The last 18 months has been a horror period for Rockhampton jockeys with John Camilleri and Justin Welburn suffering career ending injuries.

Bustling Backo looms large for Cowboys/Cutters

By **JIM MULCAIR**
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RUGBY LEAGUE: A spectator clearly remembers Daniel Backo when he first tackled a player in a match for Souths Sharks in Mackay last year.

"He absolutely crunched the guy, broke his jaw I think, and I thought: 'This bloke is something else'."

That spectator wasn't the only one impressed by Backo's bone-jarring shoulder charge.

North Queensland Cowboys spotted the big, young bloke as well and soon had him on their roster, where he remains.

Backo, the son of former Australian and Queensland prop, Sam Backo, arrived in Mackay last year to see if he could land some work with his brother Jacob, a mines supervisor.

He had been out of football for more than a year, recovering from that footballer's bane, the knee reconstruction.

In 2005 he had played Jersey Flegg and reserve

grade football for Parramatta in the NRL.

He decided to sign up at the club level for Souths but only lasted there a few games before the Cowboys snaffled him, where he played for the Young Guns in the State League.

The 21-year-old, who was a two-time Australian Schoolboy, now has his career ahead of him as an impact player for the Cowboys.

"I wanted to be signed to the Mackay team because the town was good to me"

By choice, Backo has also registered with the new Mackay Cutters State League team.

"I wanted to be signed to the Mackay team because the town was good to me. The boys at Souths were a good group to be with." Backo said on Sunday.

"Although my goal is to become a first grade football-

er with the Cowboys it was my choice to duel register with the Cutters.

"Shane (Muspratt, the Cutters coach) is a mate of mine. We played in the Young Guns last year. It was an easy choice for me to sign with the Cutters as well."

Backo will only turn out for the Cutters if he is not required for the Cowboys' senior team or squad.

"I think the Cutters will do good things this year. It's their first year and it will be exciting stuff."

The big prop/second rower sees himself as an attacking forward.

"Part of my game is to run onto the ball out wider and with my strength I see that an part of my attacking game."

And of course all props love putting the big hit on in defence. Backo is no different.

"Yeah, that's part of the game. I like that."

Feels like crunch time for the opposition of Daniel Backo this year.



Daniel Backo will be pushing for a Cowboys spot with some strong performances for the Cutters.

PHOTO: DAILY MERCURY ARCHIVES

Following in his father's big footsteps

PEDIGREE is what Daniel Backo has.

His dad Sam was a "bust-'em-up" prop who had the rare distinction of winning the man-of-the-match award in State of Origin matches more than once, as a forward.

He was a product of Herbert River junior football who left his mark on the game at the top level.

He moved to the Brisbane club Fortitude Valley and then joined the Canberra Raiders in 1983.

In 1988 the big prop was chosen for the Queensland State of Origin team to partner Sarina's Marty Bella, in all three matches. The barn-storming props were re-united the following year for two State of Origin matches in Queensland's second whitewash of the Blues in as many years.

Sam Backo's outstanding 1988 form made him a natural for the three tests against Great Britain.

He played another three Tests against New Zealand the next year when he joined the Brisbane Broncos (20 games), after making more than 100 first grade appearances for Canberra. Backo ended his career after two more appearances for Queensland in 1990.

In 2000 he was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for his contribution to Australia's standing in rugby league.