

'I sit back, watch. You learn more that way'

Article from the Sydney Morning Herald by ADRIAN PROSZENKO

Nick Politis refused to channel his inner Russell Crowe. The scene was set. Politis's beloved Sydney Roosters had just racked up a cricket score against bitter rivals South Sydney. The television cameras were zooming in. Channel Nine boss David Gyngell, sitting next to the veteran chairman, was egging Politis on. Go on. Do a Rusty. Give the big thumbs down.

Politis would have none of it. "I didn't play a Gladiator part," Politis told The Sun-Herald.

"It was great theatre for the South Sydney fans, but that's sport.

"Things change. Maybe he'll do it again one day.

"But I'm not Julius Caesar, put it that way."

Politis is many things. Car tsar, one of rugby league's genuine powerbrokers and Australia's second-wealthiest man with, BRW magazine estimates, a personal fortune of \$182 million. And, according to close friend and confidant Phil Gould: "Next to my father, one of the greatest men I have ever met."

But most of all, Politis is a Roosters man. If you're looking for proof, ask him to roll up his sleeve. When the Roosters finally broke through for the premiership in 2002, their first since Politis came on board as the sport's first sponsor in 1976, he joined the players in getting a premiership logo tattooed on his arm.

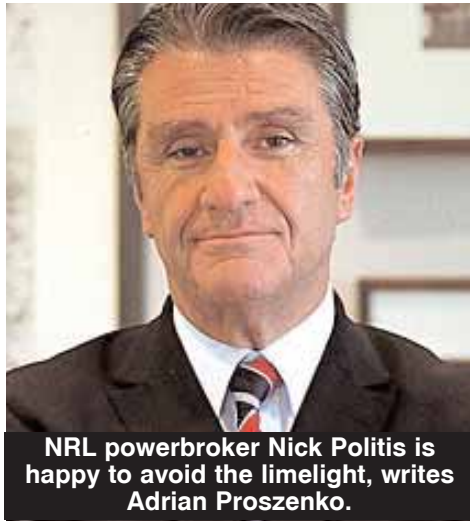
"I'm very passionate about sport and the club," he said. "It becomes a part of your life."

Not that he likes to talk much about these things. In fact, he doesn't like to talk publicly at all. After finally relenting and granting a rare interview, he got cold feet.

"Maybe you could do something on the players," he offered. "They're the heroes, not me."

It's why he refused to reprise Crowe's memorable Gladiator gesture and why he keeps a low profile. "I sit back and watch," he said. "You learn more that way."

Many of those lessons came growing up in Brisbane. They were humble beginnings. His father was a vet in his home-



NRL powerbroker Nick Politis is happy to avoid the limelight, writes Adrian Proszenko.

land of Greece. On arriving in Australia and settling in Brisbane, his family opened a Greek-style cafe.

Politis has sold more cars than most but he still remembers his first set of wheels, which got him around while he worked through an economics degree at university in Brisbane.

"A Volkswagen," Politis recalled.

The secret to selling cars, he believes, is the same as running a successful club.

"You have to be prepared to work hard, be very enthusiastic and not give up," he said. "You need perseverance. Enthusiasm."

Loyalty is another trait Politis values. It's why he has stuck by Roosters recruitment manager Peter O'Sullivan, even though News Ltd named him as one of the men involved - inadvertently - in the Storm salary cap debacle. And it's why former David Jones chief executive Mark McInnes, facing allegations of sexual harassment, remains on his board.

"The thing in life is that you've got to support people when they get in trouble if they are good people," Politis said. "That's what we're trying to do."

"We still haven't got proof [O'Sullivan knew of any impropriety].

"Mark McInnes, as far as the Roosters are concerned, has done nothing wrong. He's passionate.

"It's not as if he's on the payroll for hundreds of thousands of dollars. We all work for nothing."

It's that loyalty which has secured the future of many of Sydney's NRL clubs. At the height of the Super League war, News tried to sign the Roosters. But Politis couldn't betray his friend, ARL supremo John Quayle, despite the money on offer.

"If he'd have jumped it would have been the end of the ARL and a lot of our clubs here in Sydney," Gould said.

"You can't believe the amount of pressure they put on him, but he hung in there ... I honestly doubt that today we would have the Roosters if it wasn't for Nick."

Quayle, to this day one of Politis's best mates, said: "History has never marked how important that stand was, what it meant to so many Sydney clubs."

Max Delmege has tipped about \$15 million into his beloved Sea Eagles. Asked to estimate his investment over 3½ decades, Politis replied: "Wouldn't have a clue. I don't want to add it up. Better not to know."

But his investment is more than financial. Politis rides every Roosters play. "I remember one time as a coach, sitting up high in the football stadium while managing the team and I'd have the walkie-talkie in one hand and the mobile phone in the other," Gould said.

"[Politis would] be asking me how they're going. On his own phone he'd be talking to [a close friend, Harry Phipps], who was behind me, and on his other mobile he'd be ringing one of the other blokes and he'd be comparing everything we'd be seeing. [Harry would say: 'That shouldn't be a penalty', and then I'd say: 'No, that's all right'. Then I'd hear in the background Nick say: 'Harry, you're a bloody idiot'.

"He would sit there on three phones for the whole game. He just wanted to be part of it."

There were times, Gould feared, that Politis no longer wanted to be part of it. Like the time he sacked Ricky Stuart as coach, believing Wayne Bennett was on his way.

"I wouldn't have sacked Ricky if I didn't think Bennett was coming," Politis said. "Then Bennett changed his mind ... We went through a pretty tough period."

The other heartbreaker was Brad Fittler. Politis loved 'Freddy' like a son. Sacking him broke his heart.

"At the time, we had to make the right call," Politis said. "Smithy [replacement coach Brian Smith] came up unexpectedly.

"I was overseas and things happened very quickly.

"Freddy was upset at the time, but it was so good to see him receive his medal at the Hall of Fame induction on Thursday night."

Asked if he was tempted to end his association with the Roosters, Politis said: "Not at this stage. But eventually it's going to happen.

"I haven't got too many good summers left, you know.

"Somebody sooner or later will take over from me. Hopefully whoever takes over can continue the good work."

Politis in his own words on ...

• GETTING INVOLVED WITH THE ROOSTERS

"I initiated the sponsorship concept of sport; people had never heard of it before. I tried in '75 - Kevin Humphries was president of the league then. They knocked it back because it was too wild. The following year they accepted it. Nothing has changed; 30 years ago clubs were begging for funds and looking for money."

• HIS TRADEMARK FORMER DEALERSHIP, CITY FORD

"Everyone still thinks I've got it, but we got out of it 10 years ago."

• THE HARD TIMES

"It's been the toughest two or three years. It was tough but that's sport. It's all about the experience. You get addicted because you can't bank the results. If money could buy the results, all the billionaires in the world would have the trophy. You've got to be ready to take the fall and you've got to stand [during adversity]. The character of people comes out when you're going bad, not when you're going well. When things go bad, that's when you've got to stay strong."

• SPORT AND MONEY

"I haven't seen anyone make money out of sport in Australia. It's a country of 22 million and we've got four types of football. It doesn't stack up. Think of the world - what other country that size has so many clubs? We've got 16 NRL clubs, we've got 16 AFL clubs, we've got soccer, five rugby union franchises - all for 22 million."

• THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION

"Everyone was very united at the chairman's meeting the other day ... Everyone says it's going to happen so we need to push to make sure it does."

• THE ROOSTERS' REVIVAL

"It's a fantastic turnaround. Brian Smith, the coaching staff and the players all should be congratulated ... for their commitment and putting some pride back into the jumper."

Australia Welcomes Greek Beer

By Elise Ferrari

Premium Beverages is set to expand their international beer line, becoming the importers, marketers and distributors for Greece's biggest selling beer, Mythos. Premium Beverages managing director, Bruce Siney, said the company plans to capitalise on the trend of premium beer in Australia.

"The premium segment is still showing a very healthy double digit growth. Australians' love affair with Greek culture and Greek food means that with Mythos in our portfolio, we can really capitalise on some growth opportunities and trends in the Australian beer market, especially in the import sector," Siney said.

The 4.7% ABV beer will be available nationwide on and off-premise, and will be sold in a 6x330ml packs (RRP \$15.99) and 4x (6x330ml) cases (RRP \$44.99).

