

# 30 minutes with *Wally Lewis*

*Here in Queensland Wally Lewis really needs no introduction, but just in case you are from south of the border here is a little bit of background.*

**Walter James "Wally" Lewis** is an Australian former professional rugby league footballer and coach. Currently a television commentator of the sport, he is widely regarded as one of the greatest rugby league players of all time. His time as a player and coach was followed by a career as a newsreader for the Nine Network.

Nicknamed **The King** and also **The Emperor of Lang Park**, Lewis represented Queensland in 31 State of Origin games from 1980 to 1991. He also represented Australia in 33 international matches from 1981 to 1991 and was national team captain from 1984 to 1989. Lewis is perhaps best known for his State of Origin performances, spearheading Queensland's dominance in that competition throughout the 1980s. He captained at State of Origin level 30 times, winning a record of eight 'Man of the Match' awards.

Wally has since been inducted into the Australian Rugby League Hall of Fame and in 1999 he became the sixth member of

'The Immortals'. In 2000, he was awarded the Australian Sports Medal for his contribution to Australia's international standing in the sport of rugby league.

While reading the nightly news in 2006 Wally had a seizure on air causing his epilepsy to suddenly be in the spotlight. The intense public interest meant that many thousands of people learnt about epilepsy. Wally had successful surgery in 2007 and, ever since, has been a tireless advocate for people with epilepsy. His book "Out of the Shadows: A Champion's Return to the Spotlight" details his inspirational journey. Wally is Patron of Epilepsy Queensland.

### **What inspired you to play football?**

I was born into a footy family. My Dad (Jim) was a first grade player for both Souths and Wests in Brisbane. Later he coached for Wynnum/Manly. He was never my official coach other than in under 18's, but he certainly was my backyard coach and taught me everything I know about football.



### **What clubs have you played for?**

I started at Cannon Hill in the Under 8's in 1967 and I stayed there until I finished playing Under 12's. I then moved to high school and some of my mates who I played with in the Queensland primary school team encouraged me to move over to Valleys. It was an easy transition as I could get the bus to trainings and Dad would pick me up on his way home from where he worked in Lutwyche. I then stayed with the Valleys club all through my junior years and was thrilled to make my first grade debut for the club in 1978.

### **If I had not become a professional footballer...**

I might have played cricket. I loved the game but at some point I had to choose between the two games. It really was an easy decision! If I had not played football professionally I was thinking I might have liked to have been a PE teacher.



### **My greatest achievement...**

I can clearly remember being named in the Australian team in 1981. I was in the Valleys club house when the list was read out at about 8pm in front of all the players and footy fans. I was the only Queenslander in the team. There was a great deal of celebrating that night! I would say my greatest achievement however was being named captain for the Australian team in 1984.

### **The biggest change in Epilepsy care I have noticed since being diagnosed...**

Definitely communication! When I was first diagnosed I was not given any information. I did not feel educated enough or felt comfortable enough to deal with it. Now, information is readily available digitally and from support organisations. It was really hard for me to know who to speak to; who to go and see and I did not know any of the hurdles that may be associated with the big E.

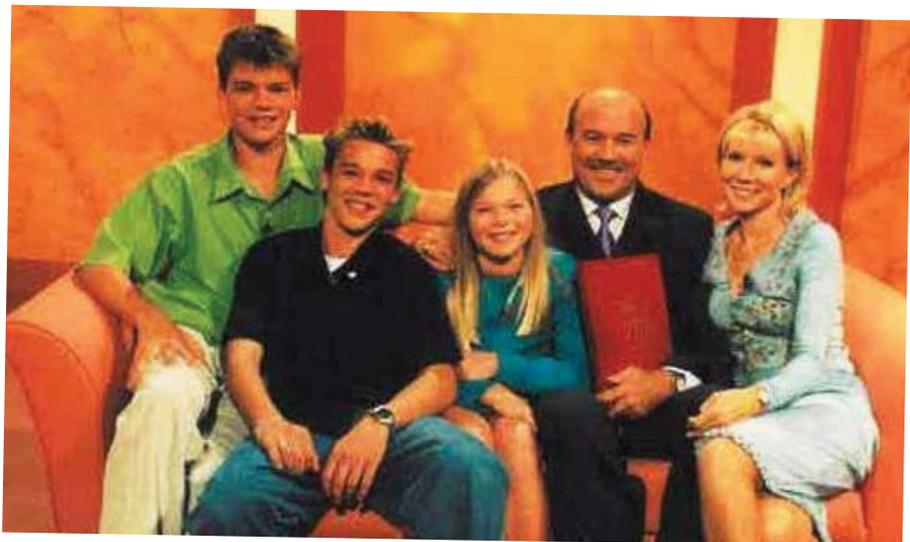
### **I would most like to travel...**

Well my most memorable holiday was definitely Egypt. I had always wanted to go and got the opportunity while I was covering a Kangaroos rugby league tour to the UK. We had a week off between the 2nd and 3rd test. I am so glad I got to see this amazing place before it became so dangerous in that part of the world. There were so many amazing things to see. The pyramids just astounded me. I still marvel at the achievements of the ancient Egyptians. How did they move those blocks with such precision? They are huge! I also loved the Museum in Cairo and I am not usually much of a museum goer!

But there are two places on my bucket list. Of all the places in the world I have travelled I still have not been to Tasmania or Ayres Rock (Uluru). They are both top of the list!

### **My favourite food is...**

Definitely seafood! It can't get any better than Queensland prawns, Moreton Bay bugs and sand crabs (although friends tell me muddies are better I prefer the sandies). I have many a fond memory of nights at the Nobbies Beach Surf Club with mates at all you can eat and drink seafood buffets.



### **My favourite book and author...**

I don't really have a favourite book or author but I do have a favourite actor. I have been known to watch Street Fighter with Charles Bronson over and over. My favourite movie is definitely the Shawshank Redemption.

### **My most embarrassing moment...**

This could be split two ways, but I will tell you the football one. I was playing for Wynnum and we were playing against my old Valleys team. My team mate Colin Scott was about to take a kick. It was just near the posts and I thought it was a pretty easy one. When he missed it I gave him a mouthful! The next kick, again an easy one, directly in front, I decided to take myself. Well I missed it and I have never lived it down!

### **The person I would most like to meet is...**

Clint Eastwood. He is so versatile and has done so many good movies from Westerns, dramas, comedies etc.

### **The music I most like to listen to is....**

I listen to all sorts of music but my favourite song is the Harry Chapin's version of Cats in the Hat. I also like to listen to Enya when driving home from work. Her music is very relaxing.

### **Any interesting hobbies?**

I love golf. I also collect phantom comics. I have more than a thousand! I think I got my

first one at the EKKA and just loved it. It made me laugh. My son, Mitchell now has them and continues to collect.

### **The thing I feel would most improve the epilepsy care in Queensland...**

Education and understanding, I feel it would make such a difference. The whole community needs to be able to recognise seizures and know how to assist someone with epilepsy. I really believe this is important. I sometimes feel that I may have been having seizures long before I was diagnosed. Friends would sometimes notice that I did not always respond to my teachers. Perhaps I was having absence seizures? I believe that more education may have lead to early recognition and definitely better ways of dealing with seizures.

### **My hope for the future for people with epilepsy...**

They don't feel alone. This could be seen as hypocritical of me as I kept my epilepsy to myself but I wish I had opened up about my condition to my friends and team mates. I think I would have dealt with the epilepsy better if I had been open about it. I feel that with information and support people with epilepsy would feel less alone and people would then be aware of what they are going through and know how to help them if needed.