



## **STATE OF MIND – ROUND 27**

The physical effects of rugby league are easy to see on the bodies of those that play the sport but the mental effects of the sport and life in general are not so easy to spot. In the upper echelons of the game, we expect our top players to engage in the most physically demanding play for no more pay than the ordinary man in the street receives. They bear the weight of expectation of thousands of supporters, in addition to the pressures of their families, their mortgages.

Following Terry Newton's sad passing, a committed group of rugby league enthusiasts who were also health service professionals came together and formed a group known as State of Mind. The spark for this activity and the genesis of State of Mind was an article written by Ernie Benbow (a human resources management consultant, Wigan season ticket holder, and Secretary of the Wigan RL Past Players Association) on player welfare issues and a letter on suicide prevention by Malcolm Rae (mental health nurse, Wigan season ticket holder and former advisor to the Dept of Health) that were published in the Rugby League Express on 4 October 2010. State of Mind has sought to right the wrongs of the past and ensure that rugby league players are given the support that they deserve, and need, to deal with the pressures of life as a professional sportsman both on and off the field.

In a short period of time they have formed alliances and put into place structures and programs that will benefit all players, regardless of their club, colour or salary. Indeed, State of Mind is now being closely followed by the Rugby Players Association and the Professional Footballers' Association as the standard by which those sports should aspire to in dealing with the mental health of their members. The effort of those committed supporters has been augmented by former players and coaches Terry O'Connor, Brian Carney and Shaun McRae and Warrington Chairman Steven Broomhead.

The aim of the programme is to ensure a healthier environment with resultant positive benefits for the club, players, staff, supporters and the community which it serves. The State of Mind programme works in partnership with the RFL, member clubs, amateur RL clubs, community organisations, NHS organisations, academic institutions and other health related organisations.

The RFL and Super League clubs demonstrated their endorsement of State of Mind by awarding themed status for a round of Super League fixtures for the first time in their history. Round 27 was named as the State of Mind Round. The activities planned at Round 27 at every home fixture coupled with the circulation of State of Mind

literature and other promotional material were designed to ensure that the aim of the programme to ensure a healthier environment with resultant positive benefits for the club, players, staff, supporters and the community which it serves was met.

The strength of support for the programme of State of Mind can be seen through the statements and support given from top sportsmen within both rugby league and the wider world of sport such as Adrian Morley, Andrew Johns, Jon Wilkin, Brian Carney, Terry O'Connor, Alan Quinlan (Ireland RU), Paul Merson, Roy Keane, Dave Pitschi (world class snowboarder), Joel Parkinson (World's number 1 surfer) and Doug Howlett (All Blacks). These quotes were also underpinned by one from Care Services Minister, Paul Burstow.

Described by Mike Farrar, CEO for the NHS Confederation and national lead for improvements in health through sport, as a ground breaking initiative in sport the leaders of State of Mind have been invited to sit on the recently formed national Rugby & Health Forum. The State of Mind programme has also become one of the key strategic partners in the Prevention of Suicide Alliance soon to be launched by Wigan Council in their efforts to reduce suicides in the Borough.

The improvements in mental health care for the participants of The Greatest Game have been significant, as a direct consequence of the efforts of State of Mind. It is hoped that rugby league players will never again find themselves in the situation in which Terry Newton found himself and, thanks to State of Mind, they will never be alone.

### **The key deliverables at Round 27 of the 2011 Season were;**

State of Mind 2011 was the first event of its kind in the Sport. Having coordinated and worked alongside a wide variety of partners, Rugby League held its first ever themed round promoting mental wellbeing amongst the players, the fans and beyond. On the back of the communications plan formulated by Agent Marketing, the following objectives were set:

- To develop and execute a PR plan involving all available press officers connected to State of Mind
- To develop the tone of voice that will be used across all communications
- To develop and utilise communication tools that will engage with chosen target markets
- To gain coverage in local, regional and national press outlets.

The planned activity was developed around a set of clear key messages. These key messages, coupled with the correct tone of voice were integral in reaching and engaging with the primary audiences of the campaign.

The PR Campaign for State of Mind 2011 included:

- Press release development:  
This included developing a press release toolkit which was sent to all press officers involved in State of Mind 2011. This ensured the key messages developed were consistent throughout the campaign.
- Coordination of press activity:  
This included liaising with the press officers of the Rugby League clubs and those within the PCTs that had partnered with State of Mind.
- Management of media relations:  
Local press outlets were serviced by the press officers and the Rugby League clubs.

### **State of Mind 2011 Round 27 - Press Coverage**

As a national campaign, State of Mind 2011 relied on the coordination of a number of different press officers which was facilitated by Agent Marketing.

Over the course of PR campaign, State of Mind 2011 achieved 83 press opportunities. This accumulated to: An equivalent advertising value of **£312,209.25**; which equals to a PR value of **£780,523.13** - The PR evaluation figures above do not include the documentaries broadcast by Sky Sports and City Talk 105.9, nor does it represent the paper cuttings from many of the smaller local and regional titles. This is due to many being free titles and therefore there was a lack of available back issues. Had these figures been included, the evaluations figures would be much higher.

The stronghold of Rugby League has traditionally been in the North of England. However, the sport has a national following with fans situated throughout the UK. For State of Mind to reach the required audience and have the desired impact, it was vital the campaign achieved a variety of print and broadcast coverage.

Within the main body of a press release and the supporting quotes, the key messages of the campaign are woven in to ensure the right messages are being communicated through the media. Agent developed a standardised press release template to reflect these key messages, ensuring a consistent message went out to the press in the areas it was being distributed. The release was allowed to be localised with the clubs activity as well as by inserting a quote from the representative of the club / NHS Trust.

The key messages developed for Round 27 included...

- It's okay to talk to someone if you don't feel right.
- State of Mind will do everything to point you in the right direction.
- Take action now, do something for yourself or your friends.
- It's all about support – be there for your family, friends and others.
- Don't be afraid to talk to someone about any issues you may have.
- Tradition means that rugby fans are unlikely to ask for support.
- State of Mind is a campaign aimed at signposting men towards avenues of mental health support.
- It's about respect and responsibility of individuals.
- If it saves just one life, it is all worth it.

### **Owen Cotterell's endurance Run in Support of State of Mind 2011**

One supporter of the campaign is Owen Cotterell, Director of Mocha TV, who created the Training Resource DVD. Owen said during the build up to Round 27:

“After meeting all of the Rugby players during the filming, I felt compelled to play my part for the campaign. I have challenged myself to run a total of 193 miles in 10 days, between 10 Clubs in the Super League, on the countdown to State of Mind. I use running as a way to deal with my stress so what better way to support this campaign which recognises that it's ok to get help and sort your head out when you need to.”

Owen's marathon feat of endurance kicked off on Friday September 2<sup>nd</sup> with a 35 mile run. He set off from Wrexham Crusaders stadium arriving at Widnes Stobart Stadium in time for kick off between St Helens and Salford Reds at 8pm. At each stage of the run, Owen was joined by others wishing to raise awareness of the campaign. Some stars of the Super League were out in full support. During his run Owen kept a blog and video diary of his experiences on the road. People followed Owen at @StateofMind2011 and also on Facebook with 'State of Mind'

## **Communications at Round 27 – Twitter**

As part of the communications plan, social media was highly integrated into the strategy. Owen Cottrell of Mocha, who directed the State of Mind 2011 promotional film set up both Twitter and Facebook sites.

Leading up to Round 27, both social networks were utilised for people to find out more information about the planned activity at the Rugby League clubs, as well as publically buy into and pledge their support for the campaign. In the early stages, Twitter was being activated very well, keeping people up dated about Owen's Endurance Run as well used to forward Tweets" to the State of Mind website and answer questions that were posted.

Many people were communicating with @StateofMind2011 commenting on events as they unfolded within the Rugby League. Amongst the people following @StateofMind2011, there was an overwhelming sense of support for the campaign, with users actively pushing the key messages out to their own extended network of people. This kind of user-led activity was ideal for a campaign like State of Mind. Not only did it extend the reach of people we could communicate with, it added to the credibility of the brand and the level of trust people place into it.

Some of the messages posted to @StateofMind2011;

Have had breakdowns & in my job the attitude is,"can't stand the heat get outta the kitchen"! Macho bollocks!

**@Andythefireman**

The brain (mind) is a muscle which we don't look after! 6'2" 15st hairy arsed fireman don't have mental issues apparently

**@Andythefireman**

Hear hear, Applauds promoting mental health issues in rugby league and wider community.

**@machomeservices**

A brilliant campaign bringing change & awareness to the wellbeing of rugby players & communities alike

**@upskill4life**

Brilliant initiative. I hope that rugby league gets behind it because as a sport we will be much the better because of it.

**@leicsparta**

Brilliant and touching a massive amount of respect to you

**@craigbairstow**

A great initiative in rugby league to raise awareness of mental health issues.

**@wirefun**

A fantastic cause promoting mental health issues within the rugby league community

**@fevince**

## **Communications at Round 27 – Facebook**

In the early stages of the campaign Facebook was not being activated to the same degree as Twitter. This was due to the lack of available wireless access to Owen Cotterell of Mocha whilst on the road with his run from Wrexham to Hull in and around Round 27. Agent took over the administration of the State of Mind Facebook page two days into the State of Mind Endurance Run.

Having taken over the administration of Facebook, Agent were able to liaise with State of Mind partners and coordinate the activity in a more integrated way; within two days of this change being made, the number of people 'liking' the page more than tripled.

Facebook was able to showcase all of the imagery taken for State of Mind, engage directly with people posting messages on to the State of Mind page as well as direct people to news coverage and post links to the State of Mind website.

Some of the messages posted to State of Mind 2011 Facebook page;

Fantastic! Needs to be made more aware of, such a taboo, unspoken health problem! No one can see, but many of us suffer from! Well Done!

Ann-Louise Garner

Brilliant way of raising mental health awareness! Well done Rugby League

Dave Parr

Does anybody know where I can get a State of Mind t-shirt from???

Chris Clayson

So important and so neglected in the past. I had a severe depressive episode whilst working in rugby league during the 2000 World Cup. I felt that I couldn't turn to anyone and be honest about what was going on. It was a nightmare from which I never really recovered in the game. I 'came out' about my mental illness some two years later and have been open about it in my employment and life since. It would be a much easier and healthier process if there was a greater level of understanding and appreciation of the struggles that go with mental ill health. Here's hoping that this initiative can really make a difference. I support it all the way.

Julian Harrison

This is such a brilliant cause and I think there is such a stigmatism over mental illness which needs addressing and hopefully this amazing cause will show everyone out there that these horrible illnesses can effect anyone anywhere..!

Jenny Brindley

Fabulous, sensitive and moving piece about State of Mind before tonight's Hull v Warrington game on Sky. Excellent, absolutely moving. Great concept, well presented.

John Carr ↩

***The improvements in mental health care for the participants of The Greatest Game have been significant, as a direct consequence of the continuing efforts of State of Mind. It is hoped that rugby league players will never again find themselves in the situation in which Terry Newton found himself and, thanks to State of Mind, they will never be alone.***