Jimmy on the Spot

COULD IT BE THAT ONE OF THE FUNNIEST BLOKES IN RUGBY LEAGUE, JAMES MALONEY, HOLDS THE KEY TO THE CRONULLA SHARKS BREAKING THEIR PREMIERSHIP DROUGHT?

By MATT CLEARY

JIMMY MALONEY. It’s a name that speaks to a man’s Celtic roots, evocative of Ireland and rugby and, well, ‘the craic’. A name that all encompassing term for good times. Jimmy Maloney. He’s that funny, red-haired bloke holding up the bar, telling jokes, cracking quips, before his wife drags him out by the ear. ‘Jimmy Maloney! Away da fool home watches’. ‘This he’s laughing, and she’s laughing, and everyone’s laughing. Ah, Jimmy Maloney, the stories we could tell. Got a thousand. Come on, Jimmy Maloney.

Our Jimmy Maloney, in the context of Australia and the National Rugby League Dream, the new five-eighth and centre for the Cronulla Sharks. He’s a former (and would still like to be) NSW Blues man, a premiership winner with Sydney Roosters and a director of the Rugby League Professionals Association. He’s 30 years old, a seasoned senior professional who lives in Maroubra with his wife and three (tiny kids).

And there’s still, as there’s always been, plenty of Irish rogue in him.

We meet the man in a coffee shop in Coogee on a rainy Thursday morning. We were due to play golf, but the weather scotched that, so over flat whites and Vegemite on toasted sourdough (Maloney has a ‘hot chocolate’), the man talks. Good ones, funny ones, Self-deprecating. ‘He’s got that thing Brett Finch has, and the Johns brothers, a fine sense of the ridiculous, delivery lines from years cracking wise in dressing sheds.

Maloney’s eyes are Teague with a mischievous glint of build-up, like he’s just about to rip into a cheeky one. It’s like the giggle bubbling away in his throat as he’s telling it, an understated smile cutting at the corners of his mouth. Transcribing his quotes, you could write ‘faintly’ before most of them. I did actually write ‘Irish eyes are...’