



The force is with the students

A little-known martial art is being credited with helping Sydney Uni rise to the top of the tree in the NSW first-grade premiership

STRANGE experiments and weird sightings go hand in hand at university. Picture the scene . . . big prop Jarrod Bryant takes one short step into the brick wall in one of the Sydney University dressing rooms, and it topples over.

Cut back to a few months earlier. A relatively short man, who has not played Rugby since his school days 20 years ago, stands inches away from first-grade co-coach Anthony Eddy, leans into him, and sends him scuttling backwards as if he'd been hit by said prop.

"There was nothing to it (the hit)," Eddy remembered. "He was only centimetres away from me but he gave me enough to send me flying."

Arrive at University Oval at the right time and you may even spot a couple of players swinging their arms like windmills or puffing their bodies like bullfrogs. Weird stuff.

The man to blame for the shenanigans is Marko Vesse, he of the big nudge. Vesse is the Australian Chief Instructor of an ancient martial art called the Yang Mian system.

Cut back to Eddy again after Vesse's demonstration. So impressed was he that he decided to let Vesse loose on his Sydney Uni players.

"The players thought I was mad," Eddy said. "But after he did that to me I thought: It's got something to it. Let's talk war."



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So he did, and eventually eight intrigued players, possibly with too much time on their hands, volunteered to begin a three-month off-season Yang Mian program with sessions three days a week.

Not surprisingly, they copped plenty from those who didn't volunteer. Comments like "look out, you're going to take off" (remember the windmill action) and "you look like an idiot" abounded.

These days, though, it is part of the Sydney Uni culture.

"Everyone still thinks it's bloody strange," Bryant said. "You get a bit of ribbing but I think everyone can see the benefits."

"They certainly keep away from us when we're doing the one-on-one tackling drills."

Okay, it might be a little rich to suggest the system can take all the credit for the Students' re-emergence as a premiership force in the Citibank/Mastercard Cup this year, but ask any of the players on the program, and they'll tell you it works.

"It's turning into a bit of a story



High flyers . . . Mal Nutt and the Uni forwards have laid the platform for some big wins in 1999. **BELOW RIGHT: Marko Vesse.**

around the club," Bryant says. "I'm probably the one who's got into it (the system) the most out of everyone. I like to do it just before the game."

"I'd gone through the routine and I like to hit the wall a bit afterwards to get used to the hits and the impact."

"I started doing it in Round 1 and by the fifth or sixth match I'd finally knocked the buggger down. It didn't hurt a bit."

The Yang Mian system originated in China about 250 years ago when, according to Vesse, 12 "Masters" piled their knowledge together and "took out all the unnecessary parts".

It's complicated and confusing. Not even Vesse can explain how it works, but he is content to rattle off phrases like "whole body conditioning", "catching the power" and "it's a little bit like being a ball on the end of a rubber band".

Attempting to solve the puzzle in just a few words, it improves breathing and stamina, and develops internal power and its instant release at the moment of body contact.

Using training methods called Through Arm and Turtle Back, it in



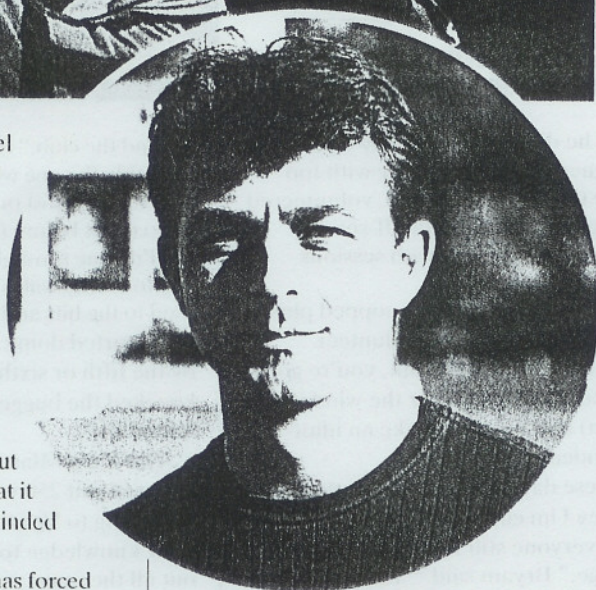
essence gives players a "steel body", able to recover from big hits or injuries quicker. Players can generate a lot of force with little momentum.

Inside back Kieran Shepherd said: "Now when I go into contact situations, it doesn't bother me. It won't stop you from going backwards when you're hit but the impact's certainly not what it used to be. I've never been winded this season as well."

These days Communism has forced the art out of China — according to Vesse only three people know about it there — but it is on the move in Australia and other parts of the Western World.

While this is the first known case where it has been used in Rugby, it may not be the last. Vesse has also been lending his services to an Aussie Rules player, a boxer and a tennis player.

He even infiltrated the Canterbury Rugby League team a number of years ago, only to have his plans scuppered when coach Chris Anderson headed



south to Melbourne.

He demonstrated his "art" on one of the toughest competitors ever to grace that code, the Bulldogs' legendary five-eighth Terry Lamb, although Lamb himself cannot remember the episode. "He must have knocked me out," Lamb quipped.

From all reports the brick wall in the Sydney Uni dressing room said exactly the same thing — moments before it was pushed over.



Vics end year on a high . . .

VICTORIA

THE VICTORIAN state team ended the representative season with a 72-7 pulping of Monaro in the curtain-raiser to last month's AIS Australian Barbarians v New Zealand A clash at Olympic Park.

Led by former Queensland prop Luke Oxenham, the Vics were a cut above Monaro, scoring 12 tries to one.

The win gave the Vics a credible 3-1 record for 1999: they beat Riverina and South Australia by the same scoreline 39-19, but were well beaten by NSW Country (39-6).

Stars in the Vics' rep campaign have been forwards Nigel Farrow and Joe Saumaisue, while in the backs, flyhalf Justin Berger, winger Paul Loane and fullback Karl Tora stood out.

BOX HILL and Powerhouse are favourites for this year's first-division premiership, while reigning champions Melbourne continue to struggle. Box Hill coach Bob Stevenson has a big, mobile pack at his disposal, including tight forwards Alan and James Latu, and bruising No. 8 Robert Pale.

WA put the runs on board

WESTERN AUSTRALIA

THE WA representative side ended their season on a high note, defeating a Northern Territory President's team 48-15 in the curtain-raiser to the Australia v Ireland Test at Subiaco.

In a bizarre sequence of events, the Northern Territory side was hastily summoned as a last-ditch replacement for Australian Combined Services, who hadn't been informed of their commitment in Perth. The match was a toe-to-toe battle for the first 60 minutes until the superior fitness of the home side shone through.

HOT favourites Nedlands continue to impress in the Perth premiership. Coached by former representative fullback Tom Fearn, Nedlands set the pace during July from rivals Palmyra and Cottesloe, while Associates have struggled.

The stars for Nedlands have been front-rowers Tim Stevens, Mike Meredith and John O'Callaghan, state captain Trevor Thomas and fullback Shannon Apaapa.