

OUR STRAIGHT MATES

With Matthew Myers

A full-page photograph of Craig Foster, a man with short grey hair, smiling warmly. He is wearing a dark blue pinstriped suit jacket over a white button-down shirt. He is holding a white soccer ball with green, orange, and black panels in front of his chest with both hands. The background is a bright, out-of-focus outdoor setting, likely a soccer field, with green grass and trees under a clear sky.

Fossie!

Former Socceroos captain, sexy Craig Foster is now a sports presenter on SBS, but there's more to this silver fox than the world game.

DNA: 2010 will be remembered for the World Cup. What was the highlight for you?

Craig Foster: Probably mixing with South Africans. While it's always great to be at a World Cup, it's more special to actually be there, because one of the most fascinating elements is how the locals deal with it. To see the South Africans' enthusiasm and pride, and the way they engaged everyone who came into town, was really quite amazing. That's the beauty of the World Cup. It changes people and it changes perceptions about countries. And it's so powerful that it actually changes countries' perception about themselves.

What do you think Australia has to do to secure hosting the World Cup in 2022?

For countries trying to host, it's more competitive than even the Olympic Games. I recently saw Bernie Ecclestone, the F1 boss, and he said that in the last 10 years the World Cup has blown away the Olympic Games and clearly stands alone. But economics make it extremely competitive and we're up against very entrenched powerful countries, both politically and economically and we have a tremendous fight on our hands. For me it's disappointing that other sports have been obstructive and I hope the bid doesn't end up being too damaged. But it's in the last stanza

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and my fingers are crossed!

Are you aware of your silver fox label?

[Laughing] No, I'm not. I have many labels and I try not to wear most of them!

So do you realise that gay guys find you hot? How do you feel about that?

No, I'm not really aware of any of that, as you can tell by my nervous giggling. I've spent my whole life in football and basically that's what I do, so I'm not really aware of those things. I don't do this job for a reaction or to be popular.

Do you have gay mates?

I have gay friends, but not really close ones. From my school days I have a bunch of friends who I've known for years that are gay. They were dealing with those issues when we were in high school and they're still friends of mine today.

There has been a lot of talk in recent times about gay footballers and the difficulty in coming out. Have you ever been aware of any gay soccer players?

Hmm... not that I can think of, from the top of my head. Put it this way, throughout my career it's never been an issue that's been touched on, either positively or negatively. You're a

footballer regardless of being gay. One thing about our code of football is that there is much more diversity. It's not based on aggression, size or masculinity. When you play at the top level of football you have all sorts of diverse teammates from every corner of the world and you become very accepting.

What do you think the reaction would be these days, if a soccer star came out?

I think the media would give it a lot of attention for a very short space of time and the gentleman in question would gain a tremendous amount of respect from both the game and the wider community. Mind you, I make a distinction between our football, the world game that opens your eyes to all sorts of cultures and lifestyles. It's the most democratic and equal of games and therefore everyone plays. That opens your eyes to acceptance.

The English Football Association made an anti-homophobia commercial, which was meant to be screened at Wembley Stadium earlier this year, but it was cancelled/postponed. Are you aware of this?

No, I didn't know about it. But I'm pleased to hear that it was at least going to happen. I was aware of the whole Ian Roberts thing when it happened and the reactions at the time. But football is based on a lot of tolerance. There

are a lot of anti-racism campaigns about the ethics of modern society and we try to teach that to kids through the game. I believe that football teaches us tolerance.

Jesus Datolo came under fire from the Napoli team president Aurelio De Laurentis, for doing an underwear shoot in an Argentinean gay magazine (Romeo Mag). Do you think he was over-reacting?

[Laughing] That's a massive over reaction! That's ridiculous. Footballers make their own choices and all that demonstrates is that in many areas of the world they are still struggling with all the levels of tolerance. But I think it's changing and I say well done to the kid.

You worked as a coach on the Nerds FC reality show. What was that experience like?

It was great. I was somewhat reluctant to do it, as I just didn't know what I could give to the kids. The sheer entertainment value of it all never really grabs me. I cover football because I'm extremely passionate about it and I do it in a very real and authentic way. But what happened was extraordinary because we went through a whole series of challenges. By the end of the show a few parents came up to

me and said it was an amazing thing for their son. They said there was an incredible change in their child's confidence and that was what I wanted them to get out of it.

So who would you turn gay for?

That's a difficult one. I've never really given that any thought. All I can say is that it certainly wouldn't be George Clooney, because looking at that hair would be too much like looking in a mirror!

What's the campest song on your iPod?

I like a lot of the old crooners. At the moment I really love Michael Buble. One of my favourite songs is *What The World Needs Now Is Love* by Burt Bacharach. Maybe that could be seen as camp? I'm afraid I've never really had the Madonna albums.

Who would you rather have sit down and have a beer with – Ian Roberts, Mathew Mitcham or Daniel Kowalski?

I'd say Ian Roberts because I respect, above all, that he was in a code where he would have found it most difficult dealing with being gay – without question. And far more than swimming or diving. To me, what he lived through is a pretty extraordinary story.

What's your porn name? (Your first pet and the street you grew up in.)

The street I grew up in was Clifford and we had quite a number of cats, but I'm not sure which one was the first pet. I think it was one called Fonzie, after *Happy Days*. So it would be Fonzie Clifford. Hmm... that's quite good.

What's your best memory of the Socceroos?

The camaraderie. The thing I enjoyed most about playing was the competition, but I enjoyed doing it with a group of guys. The sense of a team was always very important. I enjoyed getting to know everyone, competing and winning and losing together. When I retired I didn't miss the game, even though I still love playing today, but I missed the environment of going on tour with the Socceroos with all the laughter and the pressure.

Sounds like great times!

What I learned is that life is about experiences. When I think about the Socceroos, I don't think about how we beat someone one-nil. The tours to Santiago, Chile were fantastic, but I hardly remember the games. What I remember are the times sitting in the hotels talking rubbish and whatever with my mates. So at 41 years of age, I focus on having great experiences with my wife and kids every day. Because in 20 years time, that's all I'll remember.

Are you into jocks, boxers or freeballing?

I prefer the fitted boxers.

What about when you were a Socceroo?

When I played for the Socceroos I would generally wear a pair of budgie smugglers, but I would prefer to call them eagle smugglers, if you know what I mean... [Laughing]