



team player

PHOTOGRAPHY GILLES CROFTA

Professional rugby league player-turned-model Stuart Reardon talks about finding his feet on the catwalk, his Aussie mates and the story behind that awesome tattoo.

DNA: Are you expecting any crap for appearing in a gay magazine?

Stuart: Probably not so much crap, but more in jest. With the rugby lads we always take the mickey out of each other, and I'm sure I'll get a bit, just for doing modelling in general. But I don't mind, I can take it.

Do you think some players could be envious?

Well, we all do our own stuff on the side. Playing rugby takes up a lot of time, but we also have a lot of spare time in the afternoons. So some of the other players model, too. Not so many in my team, but we all take it light-heartedly and all in good fun.

Do you have close gay mates?

Jonathan, who did the photo shoot, is gay and a really nice guy. We've done a few shoots now and I've gotten to know him really well. He's a top bloke.

How did the other players react when your teammate Gareth Thomas came out?

I only started in the team this year, so I wasn't

other players in general?

Years ago, but that sort of stuff has mainly stopped in sport now, as the club would get in trouble. But the crowd can heckle players for any sort of reason and I guess it depends where you're playing.

What's the best thing about playing rugby?

It's just a great job. There is great camaraderie between the lads and to play any sort of sport and get paid for it is great, especially when you have success with it. I started playing at nine and turned professional when I was 18. I've been involved in it for 12 years now and I've been able to meet great people and travel. People play sport and go to the gym in their spare time, but we get to do it full-time and get paid for it!

You have suffered a few injuries. Are you ever concerned about the long-term effects?

When I get an injury and I'm out for a long time I get concerned about being able to come back and play. I've had an Achilles

You have eight Aussies and two New Zealanders in the Crusaders. How do you all get along?

When the club started out a few years ago, they signed a lot of players from overseas. The Aussies are really easy-going good guys. I don't meet many bad guys in rugby; most of them are great blokes. It's really an easy-going sport in general.

Australian footballers are known for their Mad Monday antics. Have the Aussie players brought some of this to the club?

Oh yeah, and now every club in England has Mad Monday. It's become a custom and we like it!

What's the craziest thing you've done when out with the lads?

[Laughing] I'm not really sure what I'm allowed to say! Nothing that crazy has happened to me, but I've seen a lot of crazy stuff go on. Once all the lads had been out drinking and came back to the stadium to show the trophy off, because we had won the Super League that year. A reporter came in to interview the players and they tackled him to the floor. Luckily, he saw the funny side to it.

Does change-room towel flicking still go on?

It's usually more a case of slapping the bare arse! I guess the towel flicking will always be around.

The big question: have you ever dropped the soap in the showers?

Yeah, I've dropped the soap in the showers and then looked behind me before I've bent over to pick it up! Everybody always cracks up because it's that longstanding joke. Someone will always say, "Hey mate, can you get that?"

Who would you turn gay for?

Gerald Butler. He's an awesome actor – except for *PS I Love You!* I once saw him on a talk show and he came across as very humble, the type of guy I could have a good laugh with down the pub.

Which Aussie sportsman would you like to have a beer with?

Shane Warne. He does a lot of crazy stuff.

We travelled to the Northern Territory this issue. Have you ever been there? >>

“Attitudes have changed all over the world and some sportspeople are starting to come out. I don't think it matters any more.”

there when that happened, but they all seem okay with it. He's a great guy and comes across really well. And when he does get the mick taken out of him, he's able to come back with it. I think they all dealt with it really well.

If a player comes out now, do you think he'd be well supported by his club and fans?

Yeah, I think they would. Definitely more so than in previous years. Attitudes have changed in general all over the world and some sports people are starting to come out. I don't think it matters any more if you're in sport or any kind of job, really, the world has changed regardless. Ian Roberts probably had a tough time, but now it's getting easier. You have to admire people like that.

Do fans in the crowd heckle Gareth, or

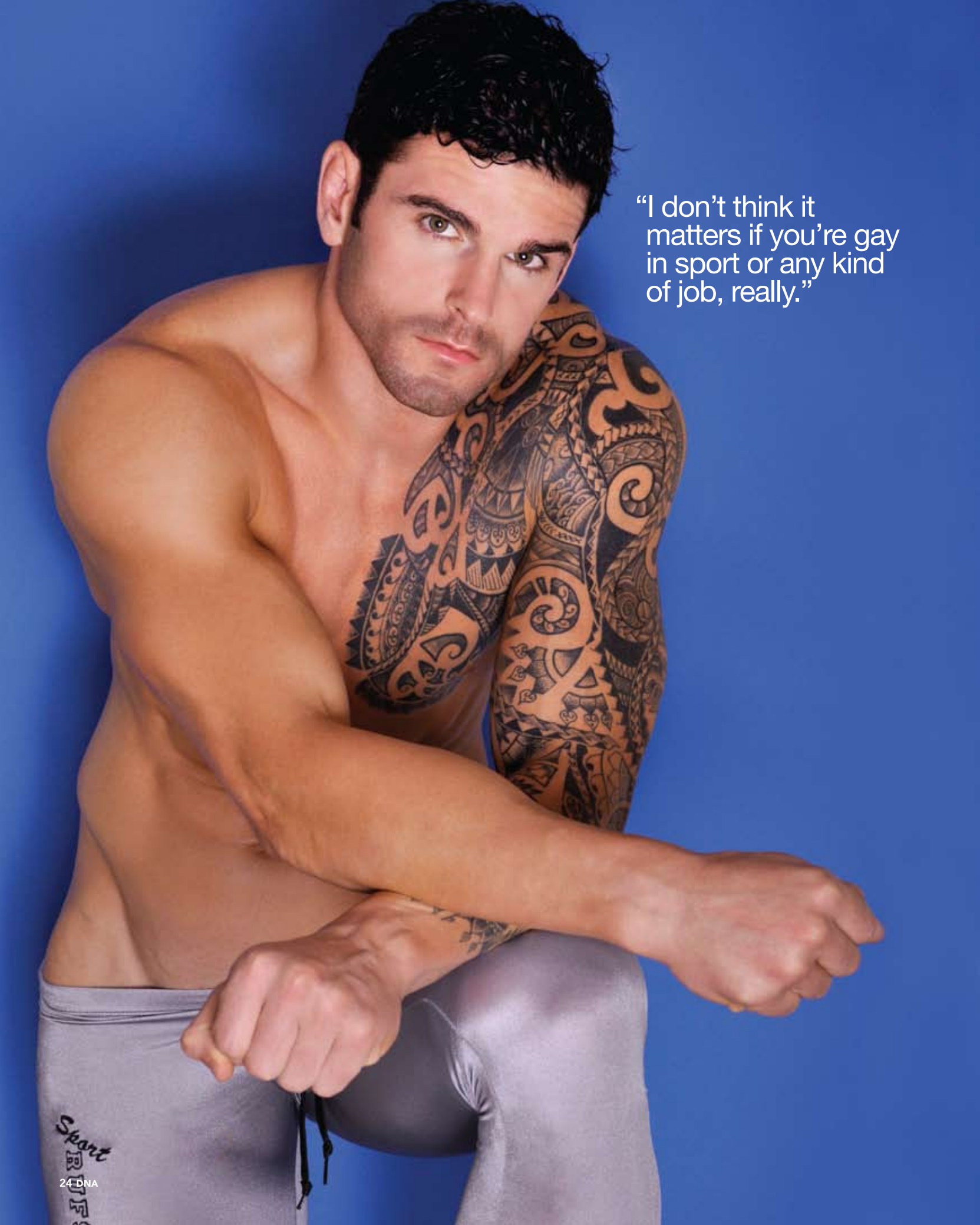
reconstruction twice and if that were to go again, I don't know if it could be repaired. Some players can have a full career without injuries, whereas I've had the Achilles problem, a shoulder reconstruction, a broken hand and a hernia. Injuries are a bad part of the sport and things like that do worry me, but all's okay for now. Touch wood!

When tackling, have you ever had your balls grabbed and squeezed?

[Laughing] I probably have. But you have to be really good at it to get away with it! You'd get spotted by the ref and get a penalty or even get put on report. And you'd have to explain what you were doing! In fact, there was that guy in Australia who used to do it, but a bit worse!

Oh yes, the Hopoate finger incidents...

Yeah, we all read about that over here.

A muscular man with dark hair and a light beard is posing against a solid blue background. He is shirtless, showing his well-defined muscles. He has a large, intricate black and brown tattoo on his right arm and shoulder, featuring geometric and organic patterns. He is wearing grey athletic pants with the word "Sport" visible on the left leg. He is leaning forward, with his right arm resting on his left knee and his left hand clenched into a fist. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression.

“I don’t think it matters if you’re gay in sport or any kind of job, really.”

OUR STRAIGHT MATES

With Matthew Myers



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>> No, I haven't, but I would love to see Ayers Rock and places like Darwin and Kakadu. My girlfriend and I would like to emigrate to Australia and we have friends and family there to visit. We love beach holidays and being active. The places I've been to in Australia ooze that lifestyle. It would be a dream to get up every day and go for a jog along the beach, or go surfing and enjoy that weather.

Who's your favourite diva?

Rihanna! I like her music and she looks pretty good as well. I really like her song *Rude Boy*.

What's the story behind your tattoo?

I wanted one from a young age, but I could never decide what I wanted. Then I had a really bad injury needing a shoulder reconstruction and had a lot of spare time on my hands, so I decided to get a tattoo. I found a really good place in Yorkshire, where I lived, and spoke to the guy there about the tribal stuff. So he came up with a design and worked it around my muscles. I just had to trust him and let him do it. It took about five days of seven-hour sessions, but it was well worth it!

What is the campest song on your iPod?

Hmm... it's a bit more of a wimpy tune: Bryan Adams' *Everything I Do* from the *Robin Hood* film. But you've got to respect that song.

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

In the UK we usually do the porn name with your first pet and then your mother's maiden name, but if I was to go with yours, it'd be Leo Briggs.

You've had your share of tabloid hassles. With the recent News Of The World scandal, do you suspect your own phones of being tapped?

No, I can't see them ever tapping my phones. Rugby league just isn't big enough, they'd be more after the high profile footballers.

You seem to have gotten past the media negativity. What's your secret?

Just to stand my ground and try not to do anything that would cause bad media attention. Try not to be involved in any scandals! And now I'm giving modelling a go and I can't do any harm in trying. If anything, one day when I'm no longer in good shape, I can look back at these times when I was.

Who has been the most influential person on your career?

My mate Leon Pryce, who is also a professional rugby league player. We've been best friends since I was 10 years old and we both played amateur together. We started playing rugby when we met at school and his dad used to coach the team we played for. We've always been close and we both signed for the Bradford Bulls at the same time. We managed to play in two grand finals together, so we have shared great moments in our careers. But he has helped me throughout my career, both on and off the pitch. ★

