



OUR STRAIGHT/ MATES

BY MATTHEW MYERS



As the Australian Open kicks off, sports commentator James Bracey discusses his dream job, his gay mate and the Nadal/Federer bromance!

DNA: Congratulations on your new gig commentating for the Australian Open.

James Bracey: Thank you! It's surreal. If you'd asked me if there was a chance of me hosting the tennis coverage of the Australian Open, I'd have laughed. I've spent so many summers watching the tennis at home with my sister and now I'm the commentator. How cool is that?

And, alongside some legends of the game: Jim Courier, Todd Woodbridge and Sam Groth.

Yeah. When my boss took me out for dinner with Jim Courier and Todd Woodbridge it really hit home. I've been watching them for years and here they were telling me stories about their careers.

Who do you think will be big at this year's Australian Open?

Nick Kyrgios is always going to be the headline. That's inevitable because he has the entertainment value and the X factor. We know he can go deep into the tournament, yet he could also be gone early. Alex de Minaur is the rising star we've been looking for. He's only a teenager but his head's screwed on and he's quite the player.

And the Women?

Naomi Osaka. We saw her win the US Open in that controversial final against Serena Williams. To win like that was not ideal, considering that in the end nobody was talking about her achievement. The way she held herself was amazing, and if she continues on that trajectory she'll be very successful.

What about Thailand's openly gay Luksika Kumkhum winning the Mumbai Open?

Talk about making a statement! Luksika has spoken many times of the challenges of being openly gay and competing in so many different countries with different views on sexuality. If want to break down barriers, that's a great stage to do it on!

Tennis has seen quite a few openly gay women players but, strangely, no men. Why do you think that is?

That's a really good point. I have no idea, but if you look at someone like Martina Navratilova, she's been an unbelievable ambassador for the gay community and for tennis. Thinking across all sports, openly gay men are few and far between. I haven't heard of any in tennis but you know they're out there.

Do you have a gay mate?

Yeah, I get two for the price of one with my best mates! They're twins; one's straight and

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one's gay and it's a hell of a journey being mates with them because they're great fun. We grew up together and our entire social scene is the three of us, and everyone else comes along for the ride. We're always together. In fact, Nathan was very excited when he heard I was doing an interview with DNA.

Did Nathan come out to you?

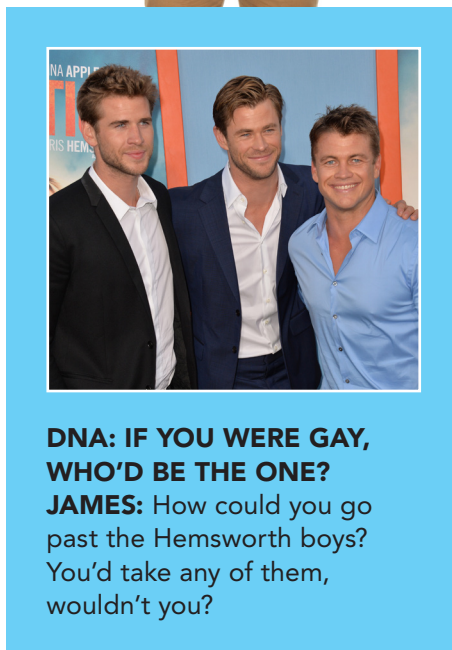
So... we grew up on the New South Wales' Central Coast and, at the time, there weren't many openly gay people in our community. We certainly had our thoughts that Nathan was gay, and he eventually developed the courage to come out, and we couldn't have been happier for him. He's such a beautiful person. In fact, watching Nathan come out was quite liberating for me; to see the person he has become and the confidence he's developed over time.

Have you witnessed homophobia in the sporting world?

Not directly, but it's something we've covered heavily through sports media, such as with sledges that have just been outrageous. They have really put a blight on certain games. The Israel Folau issue has been a big one, which was debated on our *Sports Sunday* program. We looked at how Rugby Australia has dealt with that, and how complex their relationship has become with Israel. In terms of eradicating homophobia in sport - we are slowly getting there. There's certainly no place for it.

An athletes' sexuality shouldn't be an issue, should it?

Absolutely not, and that's why it surprises me about there not being any openly gay male tennis pros. You'd assume there are gay men playing on the world circuit. We haven't heard from them, and obviously that's their choice, but I think in this day and age it's just a



DNA: IF YOU WERE GAY, WHO'D BE THE ONE?

JAMES: How could you go past the Hemsworth boys? You'd take any of them, wouldn't you?

complete non-issue.

You're a good looking - do you get approached by guys?

[Laughs.] You've got me blushing! There's been the occasional social media message with some sort of enquiry, every now and then. There's no harm in people checking. I'll gladly take some batting eyelids and a pick-up line any day but I'm happily married to my wife, Margo.

If you were gay, who would be the one?

In terms of a man crush, how can you go past the Hemsworth boys? They tick every box.

All the Hemsworths? Greedy!

[Laughing.] When it comes to the Hemsworths, you'd take any of them, wouldn't you? Chris, Liam and, er...

Luke!

[Laughing.] Yes. Speaking of good-looking relatives, I only discovered recently that my third cousin is Luke Bracey, an actor in Hollywood and model for Ralph Lauren. Now he's a good looking! He's got all the good traits in

our family! But I'm happy to play second fiddle in the Bracey ranks.

Now, we must discuss the Federer/Nadal bromance?

Oh, those two have always gotten along. Over the years a mutual respect has developed between them, with this great rivalry and friendship. Their careers have helped each other because they've had so many great battles on the court. I've also seen Roger helping Rafael out with opening his tennis academies in Spain. Speaking of Spanish, Carlos Moya! Now he's a looker. A ten out of ten!

What dance song gets you busting a move?

That's easy - Shania Twain's *Man! I Feel Like A Woman*. My dad was into Shania and he took my sister and I to her concert. That song became our anthem. If I'm ever at a party and it comes on, it's straight to the dance floor!

What advice can you give people entering the world of media?

Start young. I'm doing what I do now because I realised that university alone wasn't enough. I studied at the University of Newcastle doing Communications and majoring in Journalism, but I remember sitting in a first-year seminar where they asked everyone what they wanted to be. Everyone said the same thing - a TV reporter, host or radio broadcaster. I thought, this is one room in one university in one country. How the hell am I going to get ahead of all these people aiming for the same thing? So I did a broadcasting course where I was taught how to speak properly. The Sky News sports editor came in asking if there were any kids interested in producing some sports content. That was April 2004 and the rest is history.

You've come a long way since your days on Sky News.

I was really lucky to be there for 13 years, starting when I was 19. I found myself covering the Beijing, London and Rio Olympics, the Vancouver and Sochi Winter Olympics, the Commonwealth Games in India and Rugby World Cup in New Zealand. It's pretty amazing to have had those experiences and been paid!

What's your favourite fashion look?

I'm your quintessential T-shirt, shorts and thongs guy. I live in a beachy area and it's just easy. At Channel Nine I'm under the guidance of our fashion team and make-up crew, which I didn't have at Sky News. We used to get advice and clothes and I'd do my own make-up.

On the beach is it boardies or budgies?

I've spent a lot of time in budgie smugglers, and I don't shy away from them. I actually prefer to go to the beach in budgies.

And briefs, fitted boxers or free-balling?

Being a shorts, T-shirt and thongs kinda guy, it goes hand-in-hand that I'm also a freeballer. In fact, I'm going commando right now!

MORE: The Australian Open will be available exclusively on Nine and 9Now from January 14.