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Bulldog Greg Eastwood and Rooster Sam Moa are old mates

By STUART HONEYSETT

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Keebra Park State High mates Greg Eastwood and Sam Moa during their school days.

Sydney Roosters prop Sam Moa and Canterbury lock Greg Eastwood will go to war tomorrow night in a sudden-death semi-final at Allianz Stadium. Not so long ago, the best mates used to go to school together.

Moa and Eastwood are graduates of Keebra Park, a state high school at Southport on the Gold Coast and one of the finest breeding grounds for NRL players.

While St George Illawarra halfback Benji Marshall is the school's most celebrated alumni, many other players have passed through the school gates — Isaac Liu, Corey Norman, Jordan Kahu and Bodene Thompson among them.

The list is growing at such a rate every year that Keebra Park head coach Greg Lenton could name a Team of the Century before he hangs up his whistle.

And of all of the players he has to choose from, Moa would be named as his captain. "Sam had great leadership skills, he's a quality human being and he's just one of the great leaders I've seen in the last 25 years in the program," Lenton told *The Australian*.

"When you think Benj will be in (the Team of the Century) and Rangi Chase and Greg Eastwood and Ben Te'o, all those sort of blokes — and then you've got guys like Bodene Thompson and Corey Norman who will probably struggle to make the side — they're all great players and great guys, so that's how high I hold Sam."

Lenton quickly comes up with an anecdote that reflects the type of person Moa is. Once, the principal was warning the students at assembly to stay away from the corner shop because there were a couple of shady characters hanging around it. Her plan was to sort out the situation and Moa asked if he could go with her to make sure she was safe.

"He was a mature young man," Lenton said. "He never really blew his trumpet about the things he would do. He'd mentor kids and talk to them on the side and never say anything to you. He was a character and he just really got on well with people."

As for Eastwood? Well, he might tip the scales at 112kg now but back then he was slim enough to play fullback. In fact, Lenton has him pegged as probably the greatest No 1 to have ever played at Keebra Park High.

"Greg was one of those kids that I don't think the entire time he was here he never had the slightest problem at school or got into trouble for anything," Lenton said.

"He was a really nice kid. He had vision like I've never seen in a player. I think it might have something to do with playing junior soccer and he was used to lifting his head and looking down the field.

"A lot of league players are taught from five-years-old to keep their heads down and barge ahead. Greg had that ability to see things that other people couldn't see."

Moa and Eastwood were less flattering when talking about each other this week. Eastwood described Moa as the class clown. Moa said the thing he remembered most about Eastwood was he ate a lot.

Jokes aside, the pair have remained firm friends and still room together when they're representing New Zealand. They also have a healthy respect for each other over the impact they've had for their respective clubs. "I hold Greg in high regard, I think he's an extremely talented player," Moa said. "He was so talented as a schoolkid coming up. He was one of the best players I ever saw. He could play fullback and five-eighth and I think that's why he's got a great, natural skill set. I have a lot of admiration for Greg as a person and as a football player.

"In the Anzac Test just gone, we were in camp in Brisbane and we were doing tackling practice. I ran into Greg with a tackling shield and he put about 50 per cent effort into that tackle. It felt like Sam Kasiano, David Klemmer and Frank Pritchard all in one had tackled me. He's a lovely bloke but you don't want to get on his bad side."

And Eastwood was full of praise for Moa. He said it had come as no surprise that Moa had stepped up his leadership role at the Roosters following the season-ending injury to Jared Waerea-Hargreaves.

"It was good to have him around at school and around the team and you know what Sammy brings every week to the team — he just goes one way," Eastwood said. "He's going to be massive for them on Friday. We've got to make sure we stop him before we stop anybody else. When you lose someone like Jared you need another enforcer, and Sam definitely does the job for them."

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