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Maroons Send Slater Out A Winner With Victory Over Blues

By Michael Chammas - NRL.com

ON THE night State of Origin waved goodbye to Billy Slater, maligned halfback Daly Cherry-Evans showed why he is the man to lead a Queensland generational change by helping deny NSW a series clean sweep.

The Queensland No.7 was one of the Maroons' best in the 18-12 win at Suncorp Stadium on Wednesday night, owning an arena that he had failed to make an impression on in the past.

A mountain of defence, cobbled together with some inexcusable mistakes, denied the Blues of a chance to become the first NSW team in almost two decades to claim a series whitewash.

Queensland withstood one hell of an attacking onslaught from the Blues in the dying minutes to send Slater out in the manner he deserved in front of a crowd of 51,214.

"It was a great Origin," Slater said.

"They are a tough side and I was just really happy for our boys. We haven't had anything to show for with efforts and the footy we played in the first two games. We just had to keep turning up and turning up."

The fairytale farewell almost began to script but the NRL Bunker intervened to deny Slater - who was later awarded the Wally Lewis Medal as player of the series - first points in his final Origin game.

That honour went to Valentine Holmes, grabbing his second length-of-the-field try of the series from a James Tedesco pass to give the Maroons a 6-0 lead after 10 minutes.

When Maloney was sent from the field at the half-hour mark for a professional foul on Slater, Queensland had enjoyed 72 percent of possession until that point.

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NSW were out on their feet having spent most of the game defending their own line.

But bizarrely Queensland opted to take the foot off the throat and took the two points on offer instead of attacking a reduced defensive line showing severe signs of fatigue.

It took them to an 8-0 lead, but as we'd seen in the opening two games of the series – NSW wouldn't be deterred by having to come from behind.

In all three games, Queensland scored first this series. In all three games, NSW went into the break with the lead.

For so long the Maroons have been renowned for their ruthlessness. Their ability to kill off the opposition in key moments.

At 8-0 on Wednesday night, they had every right to run in another two tries before the break. Somehow they conceded two.

First, it was Tom Trbojevic with a 95-metre intercept from a Cameron Munster pass. Then it was James Tedesco on the stroke of half-time, strolling over untouched after hooker Damien Cook attracted two defenders close to the line.

It was hard to blame Cherry-Evans. He was arguably the best player on the field for the opening half with his game management and ability with the boot to earn repeat sets to the fore.

This was as much about NSW's resolve and desire to claim a 3-0 series sweep as it was about Queensland's inability to convert pressure into the points they arguably deserved.

Tariq Sims made his presence felt on debut with some brutal defence and runs, but he undid his good work with a brain explosion to take out St George Illawarra teammate Ben Hunt at marker after playing the ball.

It sparked some push and shove, but more importantly, it gifted Queensland a penalty that led to Holmes' second try of the night.

It proved to be a huge momentum shift with the Maroons regaining complete control of the contest once again, allowing Cameron Munster to work his magic through the middle of the field to put Cherry-Evans in under the post for an 18-12 lead with 21 minutes remaining.

NSW came home strong, but they lacked the polish and execution to come over the top of a Maroons team desperate to send Slater out a winner.



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