

# NOWWEEKEND

FEBRUARY 5-6, 2022

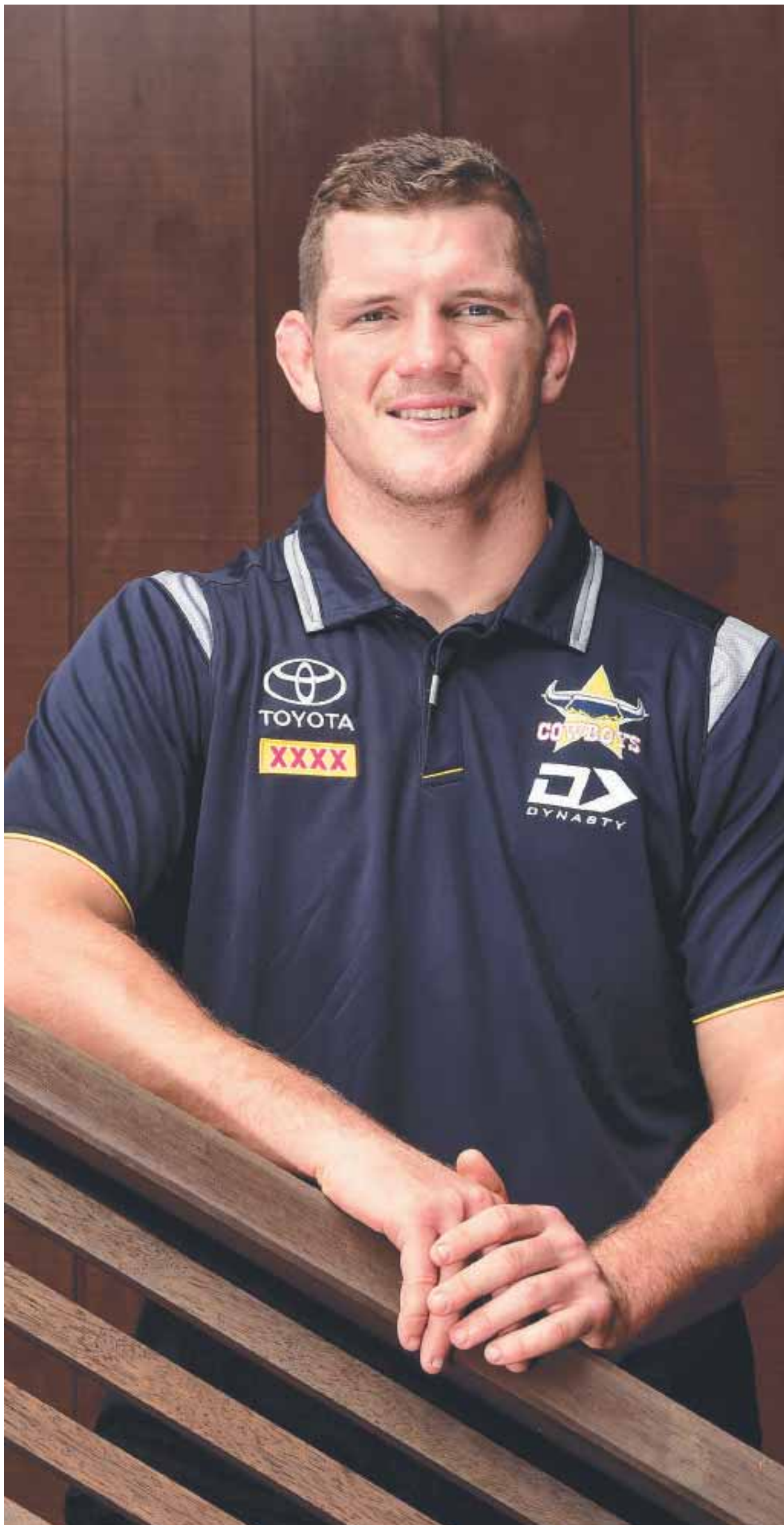
## “ STAR SHINES LIGHT ON CHARITY

Cowboys player Tom Gilbert is using his profile to help the Brighter Lives Townsville Hospital Foundation



FIGHT FOR JUSTICE  
THE WOMAN WHO COULD  
BRING DOWN A PRINCE  
LZRD MORPHIA EXHIBITION  
MURKY WATERS STUDIO





**H**e's relentless on the field but when the whistle blows, 21-year-old Cowboys player Thomas Gilbert shows he is all heart.

The forward, who moved to Townsville in 2018, may be a star on the field but it is his work behind the scenes that shines bright.

Tom proactively approached the Brighter Lives Townsville Hospital Foundation in early 2021 seeking opportunities to help after breaking his leg at training.

Since then he has visited patients and families in the children's ward at TUH and engaged with patients of the Adolescent Inpatient Unit and Day Service at Kirwan.

He was involved in promotion for the book fair, has attended Mental Health Week activities and participated in the 5th Aviation helicopter visit.

He also provided an experience prize for the foundation's ball.

This hard work and dedicated has seen him named as the foundation's ambassador.

He said he was thrilled to be the foundation's official ambassador after approaching CEO Tanya Busoli early last year to work with the foundation.

"It was time to find a way to give back to people, and obviously people who attend the hospital need it more than most," he said.

"The Brighter Lives Foundation is the driving force behind raising funds for the hospital and finding ways to make people's stay easier.

"I really wanted to work with a charity that is making a huge difference."

Born and raised in Brisbane, sport and charity is in Tom's blood.

"My dad and stepmum run a charity in Brisbane," Tom said.

That charity is Share the Dignity which works to end period poverty in Australia.

His family sporting involvement ranges from rugby to swimming and his mum Julie Gilbert is an accredited practising dietitian who owns her own business in Brisbane.

He said he was also inspired by his Cowboys family, including Jake Granville and Jason Taumalolo.

Tom noted both players' community work and ability to brighten lives away from the spotlight.

Since moving to Townsville, Tom said he has been heartened by the support of fans, in good times and bad.

He said while 2021 was not a great year on the field, he was proud of what he achieved with his charity work.

"It's humbling to know while I wasn't doing well on the field, there was something happening away from it that I can look back and be proud of," he said.

"I was really lucky to go to the cancer ward a couple months ago, just seeing people face-to-face, I feel like it has an impact and that's really special for me.

"What I wanted to get out of this role was to help other people feel good during tough times."

He has also called on other NRL stars to step-up and use their profile for the greater good, urging players not to get caught up in the fame and headlines.

"We have so many young people who look up to us, our actions and how they can be perceived is so vital," Tom previously told the Bulletin.

"If people are doing tough with their health or having a bad day or misbehaving, we can play a huge role in benefiting the younger generation making sure they're in good stead and motivating them.

"We can do that more so than normal people because of our profile."

Tom's work off the field saw his nominated for the 2021 Ken Stephen Medal for his commitment to the community.

This included club-led community initiatives such as his involvement with St Clare's Catholic School through the Cowboys Adopt-a-School

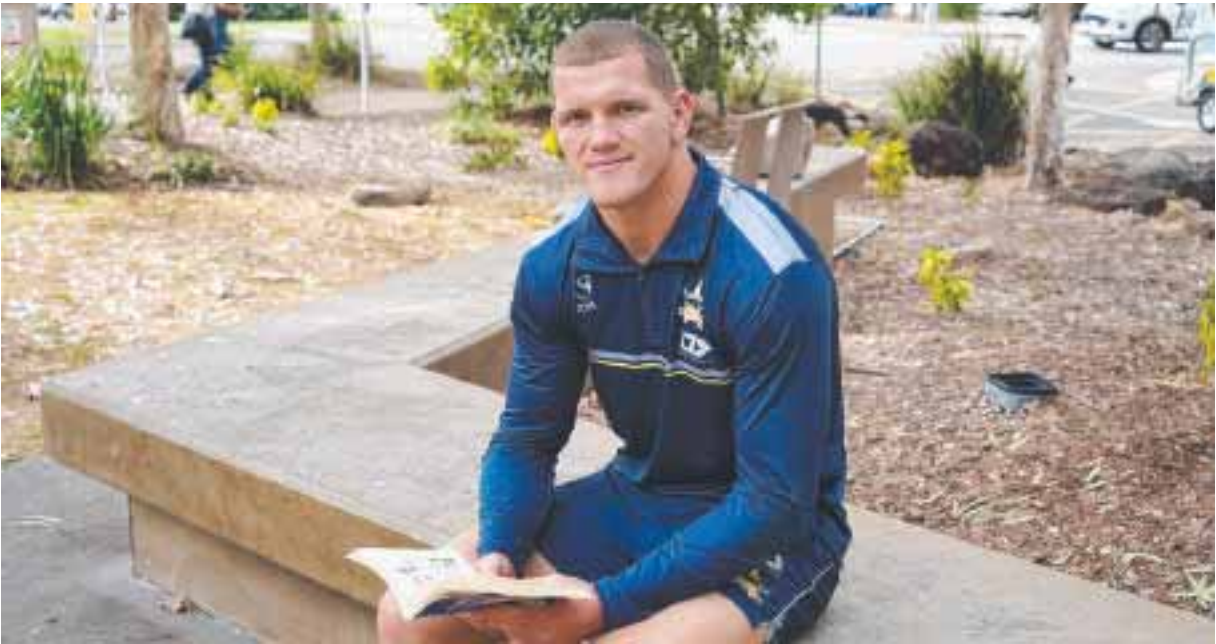
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*I've met some wonderful people, doing it tough but staying positive ...*



# Star’s focus on Brighter Lives

Tom Gilbert’s work away from the Cowboys has seen him named Brighter Lives Townsville Hospital Foundation ambassador



program as well as activities that he proactively engaged with on a personal level, including his involvement in activities for Brighter Lives Foundation.

Brighter Lives chief executive Tanya Busoli said Tom was a great fit for the foundation which is the official charity for the Townsville Hospital and Health Service.

“Tom approached Brighter Lives in February 2021 to ask how he can help out,” Tanya said.

“Since then he has visited the children’s ward multiple times, visited the youth mental health patients at Kirwan, participated in activities and helped to promote events.

“We are very excited to be announcing his role as an official ambassador.

“Given the high number of charities and important causes in Australia it can be very challenging to secure support for even a once-off activity, so to receive a proactive approach from a player was wonderful for us and an indication of Tom’s interest and commitment to be involved.

“Having worked in charities for many years I have seen the impact that sportspeople can make in drawing attention to a charity and its cause, and the joy it can bring our beneficiaries when they have an opportunity to meet their role models.

“Despite periods over the last year that Covid-19 has restricted activities, Tom has made regular visits to the hospital to meet patients and he conveys a genuine interest in their lives and experiences.

“These patients may have been in hospital for days or weeks, can come from far afield and may have only one support person with them.

“The hospital may be the biggest building they have ever seen, and it can be a very scary experience.

“To have any visitor is a bonus, but to have a player from the North Queensland Cowboys – particularly in North Queensland where we are very passionate about rugby league – is a magic moment for them.

“Quite beyond the jersey he wears, Tom’s personal authenticity comes across clearly.

“Tom has sat on the floor in the children’s playroom racing cars, and on child-sized chairs colouring in pictures.

“He engages with patients and family members genuinely and sincerely.

“He asks where they are from and makes connections to local teams and people.

“He remembers patients’ names and stories from week to week.”

Tom said he was determined to set a high standard in the community and to use his status

**FAR LEFT: NQ Cowboys player Tom Gilbert. Picture: Evan Morgan**

**ABOVE LEFT: Playing for the Cowboys.**

**TOP: Tom Gilbert representing the Brighter Lives Foundation.**

**ABOVE LEFT & RIGHT: With children from his Adopt-a-School, St Clare’s Catholic School.**

as a rugby league player to help those who have supported him in his career.

“I think it’s just given me a sense of how lucky I really am as a footy player. The struggles I have are footy struggles and it could be much worse,” he said.

“I thought the hospital was a good way to get a grip of that reality for some people.

“I’ve met some wonderful people doing it tough but staying positive and finding ways to enjoy life. It’s been really enlightening for me

“Everyone in my family is in good health, so it makes me appreciate the things I’ve got right now to be able to go out and enjoy my life with nothing holding me back.”

Tom moved to Townsville in 2018 to join the Townsville Blackhawks before moving up to their under-20 team after two matches.

That same year he was selected in the Queensland under-18 team.

By October 2018, Tom had re-signed with the North Queensland Cowboys, moving to their NRL squad on a one-year development deal.

The next year, Tom played for the Townsville Blackhawks and was named vice-captain of the Queensland under-20 team. He was also named the Queensland Cup Rookie of the Year.

In November 2019, he re-signed with the North Queensland outfit until the end of 2022.