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Author(s): Christine Wallace

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Tess has football stars breathing easier - TALE OF EIGHT CITIES - Canberra

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MEMO: Eddie Jones. Whatever's fuelling the Canberra Raiders, the Wallabies need a dose of it for the World Cup.

After yesterday's 51-16 thumping of Manly, even sceptics who put Canberra's brilliant National Rugby League season down to an easy draw are looking for the success factors driving the team's glory.

Matt Elliott's earthy approach has welded the team into a true brothers-in-arms operation since he took over as coach last year.

Raiders props Ryan O'Hara and Sean Rutgeron revealed another critical success factor: the Buteyko breathing method.

Canberra physiotherapist and breathing coach Tess Graham is one of the people they can thank for their form.

Rutgeron sought out Graham last year after hearing about Buteyko breathing's benefits in fixing disturbed sleep and boosting oxygen-efficiency among athletes.

"I heard it'd help your recovery after running, and get your heart rate and your breathing under control a lot quicker," he said.

The response was phenomenal.

After seven hours breathing training from Graham over five days, Rutgeron was clocking the same speeds at a 30 per cent lower heart rate.

His heart rate at the end of a 400m run nearly halved, and his breathing rate did halve, with a huge pay-off in stamina on the field.

Rising star O'Hara has had exercise-induced asthma since he was in Year 5.

Rutgeron noticed how often O'Hara had to use his Ventolin puffer at training and during games, and suggested he give Buteyko a try.

"It helped me a lot, actually," O'Hara said.

"I used to have about six puffs (of Ventolin) a day. Now I don't take any.

"I'm glad I did it."

O'Hara got a similar boost in his recovery rate and stamina, getting more minutes on the field than he had ever managed before.

His improved form turned heads.

After the Raiders' physiotherapist noticed the difference in Rutgeron and O'Hara, Elliott got Graham to teach several other Raiders the technique in the off season, contributing to the team-wide performance lift.

"You can't educate some mugs," said Rutgeron. "But even if you don't have asthma, I'd say give it a whirl because there are a lot of benefits in it that can help you out."

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