

Angela Powers meets ■ Kevin Sinfield

sky SPORTS

# Pommy granite

Captain of a six-time champion team. Point-scoring machine. Role model. And now 2012 Golden Boot winner. The first lady of rugby league ANGELA POWERS meets Kevin Sinfield, the sport's first gentleman  
MAIN PORTRAIT: Vaughn Ridley, SWPix.com

Ah, it's Panto season. That'll explain it then. A furore surrounding a special shoe destined for the chosen one, a crowd simultaneously hissing and cheering and a lead character as elusive as he is enigmatic. For *Cinderella*, read Sinfield. Or Sir Kev as he is known in the environs of Headingley.

When he was voted the best player in the world and given the coveted Golden Boot trophy this month, the loud and outraged indignation and incredulity from the other side of the world would have made the ugly sisters seem like shrinking violets. The Aussie 'elite' players were 'snubbed' complained the *Daily Telegraph* in Sydney, which even set up a poll pitting Sinfield against Dally M winner Ben Barba, for readers to choose who was best (accompanied by a photo gallery of Barba looking lithe and masterful in various action shots).

While the war of words ping-ponged back and forth on Twitter - and, helped by his Pommy admirers, Kev built up an 800-vote lead - Sinfield himself accepted the accolade with the cool grace he's known for.

"I was delighted just to be nominated, so to win it is pretty surreal," he said, on the day the announcement was made. "To be among the company of Garry Schofield, Andy Farrell and Ellery Hanley is something I can only dream of. Ellery was my hero growing up. I'm in shock still.

"The award is really nice [but] honestly if you asked me I'd swap it any day of the week for a Grand Final and I don't say that lightly because I know what a fantastic award it is - it's the ultimate for an individual. But the team is what it is about. I have the privilege of playing alongside great players every week and without them doing what they do I can't do my job."

Kevin Sinfield - even without the



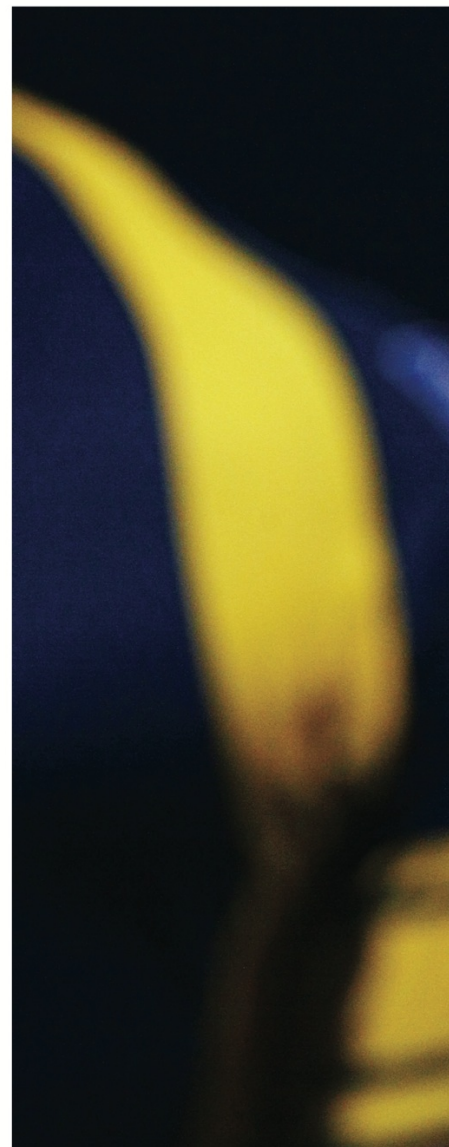
Golden Boot - is rugby league's man of the moment. Trying to squeeze this interview into his packed schedule was like a pantomime in itself, though without that ever-helpful location-revealing audience. Eventually we settle on the best he can offer - on the 'phone while he's in the car between appointments.

"It is a tough time of year," he explains. "It's an enjoyable time of the year - I love being busy - but trying to fit everything in is very, very difficult." It's just the way he likes it, and the way it has been since September last year really. That was when the play-offs began, marking a fresh start for a frustrated Rhinos side that had finished a disappointing fifth. From play-offs onwards Sinfield was scintillating, kicking every single penalty and conversion to ensure they got to the Grand Final.

"It was a tough year...very much so," he reflects. "Even during the good times in the play-offs. I don't think there was a tougher route you could pick than what we had."

A reminder: Wakefield first, a team that won the last seven including a 38-18 tonking of Leeds in round 21; then Catalan Dragons. Away. Express trip to the south of France anyone? Next, Wigan away, the League leaders and overwhelming favourites to win, but who succumbed to a stifling Leeds, featuring a superhuman performance by Sinfield. And the Grand Final - well you'll know that by now. He was knocked out in the opening skirmishes but went on to play his heart out. It's the stuff of fantasy; *Roy of the Rovers* drama with proper shoulder charges. A thrilling end to a tumultuous year.

"But the year as a whole...losing the Challenge Cup final, some of the defeats...getting beat by Wigan by 50 at home and getting hammered by St Helens when we all had red hair and all those sorts of things ...it's been a really tough year," he



says. "We want to be better than how we have performed in the last couple of years.

"We don't think fifth is good enough for a team like Leeds. We also think it makes it very difficult come play-off time, so hopefully in 2013 we can be a lot more consistent and give ourselves a much better position come the end of the year."

From Grand Final glory, Sinfield went straight into the England camp and was handed the captaincy taking over from his team-mate Jamie Peacock, who had retired from international rugby league. England went on to win the autumn international series...and then it was revealed he'd played with a broken wrist all season.

"It has been blown out of proportion a little bit," he says, playing down any hint of heroism as is his customary fashion. "I had