

“Over here and over the hill” has been heard plenty of times when it comes to Super League clubs signing ageing NRL stars.

Super League is littered with plenty of Aussies and Kiwis who have flattered to deceive, veteran or otherwise: Kevin Locke, Matt Orford, Tim Smith, Todd Carney and Tyrone Roberts to name a few.

Indeed, why spend big and go marquee when you can take a punt on someone like Jackson Hastings?

That’s not a route often taken by Catalans Dragons, hampered, admittedly, by a shallow domestic talent pool. And they have certainly pushed the bateau out again to bring points machine James Maloney to Super League.

A former working relationship and friendship with Dragons boss Steve McNamara, the perfect Pyrenees-Orientales climate and oodles of euro helped convince halfback Maloney to end his contract at Penrith Panthers 12 months early.

Wife Jess and children will accompany him to south west France to start a three-year contract in 2020.

At 33, the pass master and kicking king has done it and got all the T-shirts. His NRL career spans five clubs, nearly 250 matches, two NRL titles – with Sydney Roosters and Cronulla Sharks, he’s a World Cup winner and been a key member of New South Wales’ State of Origin wins in 2018 and 2019.

In short, ‘Mr Clutch’ as he’s nicknamed down under, becomes one of the most decorated and currently active Aussie players to play in Super League.

Maloney had been linked with Leeds after rumours first circulated he might be heading out of Penrith back in April. The Panthers’ start to the season had yielded just two wins from the opening ten games.

Veteran newspaper columnist Phil Rothfield hinted at the possibility and was subsequently rebuked by the player on social media.

Panthers have improved since those fractious moments and sit seventh in the table at the time of going to press. But reports of Maloney’s NRL departure wouldn’t go away and in an interview after his Catalans switch had been announced



there for me. They came to the party pretty early on and I knew we’d get to where we needed to.”

Maloney began at Parramatta, but made his NRL debut for Melbourne Storm rather than the Eels after an apprenticeship in the New South Wales Cup with the Wentworthville Magpies and Central Coast Storm. Denied first grade opportunities in Victoria, he journeyed even further from his Orange home, taking up residency in Auckland with NZ Warriors.

In 2011, Maloney helped Warriors to the Grand Final, though the match ended in defeat to Manly Sea Eagles.

Daughter Layla was born in Auckland before he and fiancée – now wife – Jess, returned to Australia for dad’s move to Sydney Roosters. Again, he stayed three years having marked his stint at the ‘Chucks’ by guiding them to Grand Final glory against the Sea Eagles in 2013.

Maloney could have remained at the Roosters longer, but instead chose to join Cronulla for the 2016 campaign.

It proved a shrewd switch.

By the end of the year ‘Jimmy’ had guided the Sharks to a first ever Grand Final success (14-12 over Melbourne) and at the age of 30 was picked to play for the Green and Golds for the first time – an appearance against Scotland at Craven Park.

Such a year was always going to be hard to top. But 2017 yielded a 200th NRL appearance, World Cup glory – albeit making only one appearance – plus a move to Penrith as part of a deal that took Matt Moylan to Sharks.

His 2018 highlights lay with New South Wales and its first Origin series win since 2014.

The title has just been retained in July, with Maloney finishing series top points scorer despite missing the opening encounter in Perth.

“Every place you leave you become pretty emotional because you become such good mates with everyone,” he said after confirming his NRL departure.

“But I’m excited about the opportunity, so that tells me it is the right time.”

And hopefully the NRL hasn’t seen all of the best of James Maloney.

Only Maloney

TREVOR BAXTER profiles a Catalans-bound NRL superstar

Maloney admitted: “It all started when we were in that rut. I never read too much into it but Mac [McNamara] rang me and said what about next year?”

“I’ve been in contact with him since the Roosters days and when he first got the job he text me saying to come over with him. I always thought the opportunity would be

Mark Zambrak



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