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Forged in a Parramatta Marist fire

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Blues skipper Paul Gallen. PICTURE: GREGG PORTEOUS

JARRYD Hayne might have missed out, but Parramatta Marist teachers had to smile when the NSW Origin side was announced this week.

The boys' high school in Westmead, which helped produce Nathan Cayless, can also claim new Blues skipper Paul Gallen among its alumni.

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The Sharks ace grew up in Greystanes and attended Marist during the '90s.

He soon starred for the school team in the second row and played beside his friend Brett Sargent, who is now a teacher at the school.

Sargent said Gallen's potential was obvious even as a schoolboy.

"He was the same as he is now," he said. "He was a lot shorter than most but extremely hardworking and, for a schoolboy, very powerful.

"And he was very, very competitive. That went for everything. From school to mucking around on the weekend, he had to win everything."

Gallen and Sargent were part of a Marist team that won the Metropolitan Catholic Schools title in 1998 and 1999.

The pair were soon selected for the NSW Schoolboys side.

Sargent recalled one of those NSW matches where Gallen's fiery will to win again came to the fore. The Blues were playing their fiercest rival, Queensland.

"During the game there was definitely a bit of scuffle and Paul was definitely involved, in all of it," Sargent

laughed.

"He tried to fight the whole Queensland team."

Gallen was later awarded man of the match honours.

While the former Marist student may be a Parramatta expatriate, the Eels will have a current player lining up against Queensland next week.

Prop Tim Mannah regained selection after his Origin debut last year.

* The Eels announced the signing of Bulldogs pivot Ben Roberts on Tuesday. The former New Zealand and Samoan international will join Parramatta next year on a two-year deal.

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