

Shane Crawford: That's what he's walking about

I watched The Footy Show episode six weeks ago when the show was dedicated to Breast Cancer Awareness Network. Shane Crawford offered to run from Adelaide to Melbourne to raise awareness for the Network, Raelene Boyle had come onto talk about the work of their many volunteers, helping those with Breast Cancer as well as their families. The Footy Show was a sea of pink, all the men from the show wore pink, but it was Shanes act of tom-foolery in suggesting he run that stood out on the night.

He started running 12 days ago, starting 6am in the morning, and running and walking into the night, stopping along the way to be cheered by men, women and children, many in the pink deck out associated with Breast Cancer. Last weeks Footy Show featured how he was going. Shane looked totally rooted, emotional, distressed and determined. His happy silly face was replaced by a serious, in pain and insistent face. I cried just looking at him and wrote a note to myself to donate before he finished his run.

Different ex-team mates, Gary Lyon and even Sam Newman, the other deeply intelligent and caring man who also acts the clown for his role on the show, they supported him a bit but it was all Shane Crawford. With his support team, with the love and encouragement from the country towns and their folk, he found something within himself that has changed him forever. He says it's the people he met along the way who gave him courage, the survivors of breast cancer or their friends and families of those who did or often didn't survive.

I think that's true – that his giant heart connected to theirs, but his giant heart was there in the first place. I don't know much about him as a footballer, other than memories of him at the 2008 Grand Final and his retirement just after, and of course, his clowning, often idiotic record attempts on the Footy Show for the Guinness Book of Records, some he's got, some he's failed at. He's a great performer and a very funny man.

On this run/walk of over 750kms, away from his family (except for a visit on his birthday – he has a loving wife and two very young beautiful boys), he was mostly alone, on the road, in his mind. You can see by the little I watched how he has been transformed. How he dug deep to be able to manage this physical and emotional feat, just as anyone diagnosed with any kind of cancer or major illness, has to dig deep to fight to survive.

His run has also transformed others. Even now I tear up thinking about his appearance on the show last night. He'd cleaned up and perhaps rested at Crown before running/walking the last 4 kms to Bendigo Street, Richmond, to pass more cheering crowds and a sea of pink outside the studio.

Jimmy Stymes had just been interviewed on the show and was in the studio just outside the audience and he and Shane hugged before Shane humbly walked onto the set, did his usual hand greeting of audience members. Shane shook hands with the panel and hugged Sam, Gary and Jim.

At this stage the tears were truly flowing (in my lounge) and you could see he hardly contained himself as well. What was most striking is that he couldn't look directly at the camera, his emotional state left him overwhelmed and tearful as well, which really set me off. Gary Lyons first words were "So what took you so long" made everyone laugh and broke the ice, but the feelings continued to fill the room, there and here, and I imagine across Melbourne, and I was glad that early on in the day I'd remembered to donate.

Sam Newman said something like "I know we all give you a really hard time but we couldn't be prouder of you". Shane shook his hand and heard the love that went with these words. When asked how he found the strength to do it, he kept going back to the people he met along the way. If they could find the strength and courage, then he could. He found the people he met were his heroes, not himself.

The Footy Show showed a selected package of his run, which gave everyone time to collect themselves. Shane looked as if recovery would take a while, I think physically he is in pain. He thanked his support team, the Footy Show, the sponsors and the Network and now he gets to go home and go to recovery. If the footballers have mornings of recovery after each game, I can't even imagine what type of recovery he will need.

It was a brave, stupid and ultimately beautiful and human effort that this young man has done and he will forever be a champion in my eyes.