

The King and his princes

Wally Lewis' boys are finding stardom of their own on the small screen, writes Alex Bernard

Suncorp Stadium can hold more than 52,000 people but this morning there's just a handful of people here setting up for the Artie Beeton Tribute. I'm sitting in the eastern stand with another of Queensland's favourite sons Wally "The King" Lewis.

For all his iconic status on the football field, out of the spotlight Wally is a very down to earth, affable man. We're talking about the horrific floods of 12 months ago and he's telling me how he and his sons, sports presenter Mitch, 25, and actor Lincoln, 24, helped with the clean-up. In typical Lewis style, he's modest about this but I couldn't help but wonder what it must have been like for those people who opened their door to find Wally and his boys ready to lend a hand.

"We're a very tight-knit bunch, the Lewis clan," says Wally. "When I look at how well the boys are doing, Mitch now up at Nine with me and Linc with his acting, the word proud doesn't do it justice."

Channel Nine has something of a monopoly on the Lewis men these days. Wally has been reading sport news for 12 years; Mitch started reading sport last July (in addition to his duties at Nova radio station) and Lincoln will be seen this year in Nine's new drama series *Tricky Business*.

Wally is delighted to have Mitch join the Nine stable. "Nine's home to me, they've been so supportive when I had my health issues, I'm glad Mitch has made his start here. After watching him for the first three weekends I thought he was a real pain in the arse! He didn't make a single mistake! He's doing really well. And that first cross when Mitch said 'And now we're going to cross to the Old Man at Suncorp Stadium' God, I laughed."

While it goes without saying all mothers are proud of their children's accomplishments, if you held an actual competition Jackie Lewis would be very hard to beat. Both her sons are a parent's dream; confident and self-assured, well-mannered, handsome young men.

I congratulate her on what lovely young men her sons are and her reply is typically modest. "Thank you, we've always tried to instil in all three of our kids the importance of good manners and showing respect to other people, but really it's up to them to carry that through. They deserve the credit because they all do it."

As a teenager Mitch Lewis was obsessed with movies and having dreams of becoming a film director. He studied film and television production after high school, but after one day

of work experience at Nova 106.9, radio became his focus. He began by answering phones and getting coffee but four years on, he's the station's sports reporter and movie reviewer, as well as assistant producer of the breakfast show.

Then, in July last year, opportunity knocked on his door. Channel Nine was looking for a casual sports presenter and asked him to audition. "I was so nervous that first night I almost wanted something to happen so I wouldn't have to do it," he confesses. He needn't have been worried. Reports from those in the industry say Lewis' future is bright on the sports desk. Brother Lincoln is also thrilled by his brother's new role. "He's really good! I'm so rapped for him because he's worked very, very hard and now it's all starting to pay off."

Meanwhile, the whole family agrees Lincoln was destined for the stage from an early age. "He's always been the show pony of the family," says Mitch.

Starting off in children's television, Lincoln gained popularity and won a Logie for his role in *Home and Away*. He has starred with top tier actors Guy Pearce and Claudia Carvan in *33 Postcards* and this year he'll be seen alongside Shane Bourne and Debra Byrne in *Tricky Business*. While still on *Home and Away* Lincoln secured the same American agent who represents Julian McMahon and the Hemsworth brothers, Chris and Liam, who are now making their mark in Hollywood so it's no surprise that is next on Lincoln's agenda.

Lincoln says his father has been a role model for helping him deal with well-wishers and autograph seekers as the public interest in him grows. "He's so gracious about it and makes time for everyone who wants to shake his hand. I've learnt so much from watching Dad."

I understand what he means when I see first-hand Wally's magnetic attraction. As I finish my chat with Mitch inside McDonalds next door to Suncorp Stadium at Milton, Wally joins us and a steady stream of kids, dads, granddads and everyone in between approaches The King for an autograph or just to shake his hand. And he responds to every single one of them.

But even with his star ascending, Lincoln says he's in no danger of getting a big head. "You have to leave your ego at the door in the Lewis house! My sister Jamie-Lee gives me a flogging, as does Pop and Uncle Bruce - the whole family really. It's just not something mum or dad would ever put up with."

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