

The battle over breakfast

It's musical chairs in Brisbane radio as the FM stations chase better ratings.

Story by **Chris Herden**

Ash Bradnam and David 'Luttsy' Lutteral's reputations as the bad boys of Brisbane radio haven't deterred Nova 106.9 from welcoming the controversial duo back to the morning air waves. Breakfast is the jewel in radio's crown and when Nova came to Brisbane in 2005 the team of Ash, Luttsy, Kip Wightman and Meshel Laurie made the FM newcomer the undisputed kings. Their rein in the hotly contested breakfast slot lasted for five years.

But the team started to lose its shine in 2007 when Luttsy was involved in an assault outside a nightclub and left the station soon after. Bradnam followed in 2009 after he was charged with drink driving a couple of hours after finishing his breakfast radio shift.

Nova general manager Sean Ryan says all has been forgiven and he is thrilled to welcome back a team that was integral to Nova's earlier success. "I think we all get a bit naughty from time to time but they were part of a really successful show for five years because they reflect what happens on the streets of Brisbane," Ryan says.

The new team of Ash, Luttsy and former *Big Brother* starlet and B105 defector, Camilla Severi will be on air from 12 September and was announced with much fanfare at a public breakfast where Bradnam didn't shy away from the tough questions.

"I've realised that without my health, family and friends, I'm not much good to anybody," Bradnam says. "I've spent the past two years getting myself right. I was a pretty sick unit and I needed help and I'm in a really good place at the moment."

Sean Ryan's willingness to forgive and

forget the past indiscretions of the high-profile pair is an effort to stop the station's gradual but continual slide down the breakfast ratings leaderboard since late last year. "I don't really talk too much about what's happened in the past. I like to talk about what is going to happen in the future and that's up to the listeners of Brisbane," he says.

This year Nova 106.9 has consistently been number four in the breakfast slot. The latest Nielsen survey (to the end of July) shows Nova trailing behind Spencer Howson, *bmag* columnist and breakfast presenter on 612 ABC (who has dominated the lead for the last two years), 97.3FM and B105.

Eighties, nineties and now mix station 97.3FM is on the rise, leapfrogging B105 to become Brisbane's top radio station overall due to its breakfast (Robin Bailey, Bob Gallagher and regular *Sit Down Comedy Club* host, Terry Hansen), morning and afternoon audience share.

"People ask me why we don't have a stand-up comedian in the show and I don't think you need to cue the funny person," Sean Ryan says about his new team. "It's not about pushing the funny button and somebody talks. I think Brisbane needs a radio station that's real and not formatted nor fabricated. We're telling Ash, Luttsy and Camilla not to be anything but themselves."

Meanwhile Luttsy says they're not looking at the opposition. "I don't think Ash and I have ever budged from what we want to do on air. We've had two years where we've talked to people about what they expect from radio these days and what are the shortfalls. Building off that, we want to create



Ash, Camilla and Luttsy

something that people will enjoy listening to," he says.

Bradnam says his time away from the Nova breakfast show has given him an appreciation of his passion for radio. "I've got two years of creative ideas up my sleeve and I've spoken to Luttsy and we agree we just want it to be real. People will be able to relate to it because, at the end of the day, if I'm being honest and genuine then that will come through."

Local media buyers will be watching the shuffle at Nova closely. Main Media managing director Sandy Germain approves of the change. "They've lost that dominant position they used to have a few years back [but] the people they've got in have a proven track record," she says.

However, it will take several months to tell whether audiences agree. Germain says she has been surprised by some of the negative

comments online about Camilla's switch from B105 but says both stations are in a very competitive market. "It'll be towards the end of the year before you get much of an indication whether this has been successful or not," she says

The current Nova 106.9 breakfast team of Meshel, Tim and Marty will vacate the Brisbane slot and go national in the 4-6pm drive time from 12 September. The musical chairs continue with Nova's current national drive presenters, Fitzy and Wippa replacing Merrick Watts in the Sydney breakfast slot.

Over at B105, Adelaide announcer Abby Coleman moves into Camilla's vacated seat. And with rumours of Kip Wightman also set to return to Nova from 97.3FM, you could be forgiven for having to double check your radio dial to remember just what station you're listening to. Stay tuned for further shake-ups.

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