



PRIME MINISTER

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SPEECH FOR THE
PRIME MINISTER'S OLYMPIC DINNER II
MELBOURNE - 20 MAY 1988

Kevan Gosper,
Don Trescowthick,
Olympic Champions of the Past and
Competitors of the Future,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Hazel and I are very pleased to welcome you to the Prime Minister's Olympic Dinner.

I suppose this is the closest most of us will ever get to appearing on centre court at the National Tennis Centre - even if we are wielding knives and forks rather than tennis racquets.

I congratulate the organisers for creating such a successful dinner.

This is the biggest fundraising event in Australia's sporting history.

Your presence here tonight has raised more than one million dollars towards the cost of sending Australia's team to the Olympics this year.

That's on top of the two million dollars which the Federal Government is contributing.

That provides a tremendous springboard for the effort of raising ten million dollars to cover the costs of sending our team to Calgary for the Winter Olympics and to Seoul for the Summer Olympics in September.

Australia's got a tremendous record of achievement in the Olympic Games - and a proud record of support for the Olympic cause.

We're one of only three nations to have participated at every Olympic Games.

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In 1956 we hosted one of the friendliest and most successful Games ever held.

And a look around the tables at the Olympic medal winners who are here tonight shows that we have produced a great crop of Olympic champions - and it is our belief that we can continue to add to the ranks of those champions.

This year we're sending to Seoul our largest Olympic team ever - a team of 290 sportsmen and sportswomen supported by 80 officials for a total contingent of about 370 people.

Among them are the champions of the future - men and women capable of bringing home gold to Australia.

All of them, drawn from the cream of Australian sports, represent the finest exponents of the Olympic spirit: friendly competition in pursuit of excellence.

Damon Runyon said, "It may be that the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong - but that is the way to bet." Runyon's words, cynical though they may sound, indicate the increasingly tough and competitive world our Olympic sportsmen and women face. But we have thrown up champions against the odds before and I am sure we will do so again.

Our team is already hard at work, preparing themselves mentally and physically for what will probably be the greatest sporting event of their careers.

It's up to the rest of us to help them with that work - to lend our support to the fundraising effort to ensure a successful mission to Seoul.

For ultimately, sending a team of this size and calibre to an Olympics is not something governments can, or should, do alone.

The effort should be a co-operative one.

It should involve private companies, community organisations and individuals.

Tonight's success can give us confidence that we will get that involvement and that together we will send to Seoul the best prepared and best equipped team Australia has ever sent to any Olympics.

So it gives me great pleasure now to launch the 1988 Olympathon.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I referred a few minutes ago to the 1956 Games, held in this city, and we have just seen Debbie Flintoff light the torch which burned throughout those games.

As you all know, a number of Australian cities, including Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, have expressed some interest in hosting the 1996 Games.

I'm not in a position now - I don't think anyone is - to express support for the bid by any of these cities. It's still a very long way down the track.

But at this stage we can at least agree that it is very pleasing to see the interest and enthusiasm being generated throughout Australia about the possibility of hosting another Olympic Games, whether it be in 1996 or at a later time.

In the day to day grind of our lives it is often easier to focus on those things that divide us as a community.

But events such as the Olympics - whether hosting them or participating in them - remind us of the far more important qualities we share - how very much we all have in common.

At its best, the Olympic spirit offers the world a unique and compelling alternative, a reminder of how insignificant are our differences and how overwhelmingly logical it is to promote where possible constructive and friendly co-operation throughout the world.

It's fitting that, as the Patron in Chief of the National Appeal Committee of the Australian Confederation of Sport for the Disabled, I recall at this dinner the fact that in Seoul, Australia will also be represented by about 200 disabled athletes who will be competing in the Summer Paralympics. I'm sure I speak for you all in wishing them well both in their fundraising effort and in their athletic performances at the Paralympics.

So in every way, the Olympics represent the best in Australian sporting prowess - our commitment to excellence at the highest level.

Our athletes go to Seoul to compete with pride and they take with them the hopes of their fellow Australians, the best wishes of the whole Australian community, and - through this Olympathon - the total community support they need and deserve.
