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PRIME MINISTER

**ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL LEAGUE CENTENARY BALL
16 APRIL 1996**

To Jeff Kennett, to John Kennedy, to Ross Oakley, to the Lord Mayor of Melbourne, to Kim Beazley, the Leader of the Federal Opposition, to other distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great delight to share this marvellous Australian occasion and this marvellous Melbourne occasion and to participate in what is certainly the best attended ball that I have been to in all my 22 years of political life.

It brings together over 3000 sports loving Australians on the greatest sporting arena in the Australian nation. I thought you'd like that - but it's true - and it also celebrates a hundred years of the authentic Australian football code. I say that with continuing respect for all of the other football codes that enrapture Australians, both as participants and also as spectators, but a hundred years of a game that has bound together the affections and the support and the adulation of millions of Australians.

It's a game that's cut right across boundaries of class and politics and attitude and background, and it is an occasion, ladies and gentlemen, in which we can salute the contribution of the players - and there are many of the greats of Australian football here tonight - and all of us join in saluting the contribution that they've made to the game and it's also an occasion for acknowledging the contribution of those who run the game and it's an occasion to celebrate the sheer delight and joy that the game has brought to millions of Australians through the generation.

Ladies and gentlemen I am delighted to be here both personally and as the leader of the federal Government to pay my compliments to the Australian Football League, to compliment it on the way in which it has contributed to the great national cement of Australia, which is our affection for sporting endeavour and sporting achievement. I wish those who run the Australian Football League, I wish those who play in it, I wish those who follow it, and above all, I wish the citizens of Melbourne a very happy night and I wish you many many years of enjoyment in watching the great game of Australian football. Thank you very much for having me.

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