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23 January 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON. JOHN HOWARD MP
LAUNCH OF AUSTRALIA POST
AUSTRALIAN LEGENDS STAMP SERIES
SYDNEY CRICKET GROUND**

E&OE.....

Thank you very much Mr John to the MC, Alan Jones, to Maurice Williams the Chairman of Australia Post, to Sir Nicholas Shehadie the Chairman of the Sydney Cricket and Sports Ground Trust, Denis Rogers the Chairman of the Australian Cricket Board, Alan Davidson the Chairman of the NSW Cricket Association. And I notice amongst the many sporting personalities here today the one person who played with the man who is going to be named as the carrier of the title of the first Australian legend in the postal series, that's Neil Harvey, so a particular welcome to Neil.

Ladies and gentleman, I want to say a couple of things about Australia Post, Australia Day, but also of course a number of things about the significance of the inauguration of this series in postage stamps titled Australian Legends. Australia Day in my experience has been one of those celebrations which, in the quite spontaneous fashion, has grown in stature and lustre and public support over the years. When I was a school boy in Sydney in the late 1940s and early 50s, Australia Day was I think still called Anniversary Day - and people didn't celebrate it with quite the enthusiasm and the affection and the reverence that they do these days. And over the years in a quite unselfconscious, spontaneous way Australia Day has gathered support.

We have major celebrations all around Australia and, contrary to popular comment in some of the newspapers in recent days, the idea that the Prime Minister of this country should actually announce the Australian of The Year in a city other than Sydney is not a heresy. It has never been the situation that Sydney has some kind of mortgage on that particular event and the work of local Australia Day Councils and Barry Unsworth, a former Premier of New South Wales, who is now the Chairman of the Australia Day Council here in New South Wales - those organisations do a marvellous job in focussing our public celebration of our national day and I am very happy to say as Prime Minister of Australia how delighted I am at the growing public affection for,

and public support for Australia Day - it is an occasion which belongs to all of us irrespective of our political beliefs, irrespective of our ethnic or other backgrounds and irrespective of views we may have on other subjects - Australia Day is an occasion where those differences dissolve and are replaced by the things that bind us all together as Australians. And Australia Post has played a major part as a big sponsor of Australia Day and Australia Post itself is, as it's Managing Director has said, it is something of an Australian icon and it has made a great contribution over the decades to getting rid of what Geoffrey Blainey described as the 'tyranny of distance' - which was a reality of the formation of Australia and has been a reality of Australian life for so very long.

So I want to thank Australia Post for inaugurating the series of Australian Legends. And I understand that over the next five or more years - each year - there will be an Australian Legends postage stamp. And it is of course in my view, and I am sure in the view of all Australians, entirely appropriate that the first Australian legend should be the greatest living Australian and that is Sir Donald Bradman. It is entirely appropriate that in choosing Sir Donald as the first in the series of Australian legends, Australia Post recognises the special contribution that he has made to the Australian character, to the Australian identity. He wasn't only the greatest cricketer ever to play that wonderful game. He didn't only achieve the most extraordinary test average of just short of 100. He didn't lead what most people still regard as the greatest cricket team ever to have left Australian shores and that is the famous 1948 Ashes Team that went to England.

But more than that, or equal to that, he gave hope and encouragement and inspiration to a generation of Australians - particularly during the depression years when the memories of the terrible slaughter and loss of young Australian manhood in France and on the beaches of Gallipoli was still very much part of the Australian psyche. When the spirit and the hopes and the sense of well-being of the Australian people were at a particularly low ebb, he gave all of Australia then enormous hope and enormous inspiration. And he gave them something very tangible and something very enjoyable to believe in, to identify with and they saw him as a repository of what was valuable and what was positive about the Australian character. He had great ability, he had great tenacity, he was infinitely courteous and he had great humility. And they are very fine qualities and they are qualities that Sir Donald has carried through his entire life.

The first time that I came to this ground in my life was in 1949 and that was to see Sir Donald play his very last innings at the Sydney Cricket Ground in the Kippax Oldfield Testimonial. And I came there as a 10 year old boy with my father and I sat on the Sydney Hill where so many people did in those days, and it was much part of the practice and the institution of coming to watch cricket in those days and into the 1950s and for part of the 1960s. So I have a particular memory of that and it is an extraordinary thing that it is now only a few years short of 50 years since he stopped playing first class cricket and apart from what I understand, one Prime Minister's XI that one of my predecessors persuaded him to turn out in in 1963, it's just on 50 years since he had played the game. And yet he remains in the hearts and the minds of Australians as still The Don. He's straddled the generations of Australians like no other Australian has ever been able to do. And when you talk about cricket to children under 10 now they still talk about Bradman. I am told that if you go around the Indian

sub-continent the name Bradman, when you are asked about Australians, is still the name that is first delivered and the name that is most vividly remembered. So for all of those reasons I could not think of a finer, more appropriate and entirely perfect choice that Australia Post has made in choosing Sir Donald Bradman as a subject of the Australian Legend series. It is the first time that Australia Post will have a living Australian on the postage stamp - and the idea over the coming years of having a famous Australian figure on the postage stamp as part of this Legend Series is just another way in which a great Australian organisation is making a contribution to an understanding of Australian history and a contribution towards honouring not the performance only of people on the sporting fields but also the contribution that those sports men and women have made and continue to make to the Australian character.

I have to say that it is a great personal pleasure to have been asked to be here today and to launch this series. This is a slightly easier meeting than I had yesterday and it is a great personal pleasure to be associated with a game and of course the greatest personality in that game for which I have an immense personal affection.

Australia Post today recognises Sir Donald's contribution in two unique ways. Firstly, Sir Donald will appear on two stamps, the first living Australian featured on an Australian stamp - there will be a portrait on one of those stamps and his classic cover drive on the other. Secondly, it will be struck in gold - the stamps will be presented to Sir Donald and he is sorry that he can't be with us today, but in a separate function in Adelaide this morning they are going to be accepted on his behalf by Mr Mark Taylor, the Captain of the Australian Cricket Team and I will add to the written text that I was asked to deliver verbatim - can I simply add that all of us wish Mark and his colleagues the greatest of good fortune when they do battle with the West Indies commencing in Adelaide on Saturday morning.

And it is now my very great pleasure to release the stamps publicly.

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