

19 June 1997



**TRANSCRIPT OF PRIME MINISTER:
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
DOOR STOP INTERVIEW
LORD'S CRICKET GROUND, LONDON**

E&OE.....

JOURNALIST:

How is the team feeling?

PRIME MINISTER:.

The team is in great spirits.

JOURNALIST:

What did you say to them?

PRIME MINISTER:.

I wished them luck. I had a very long talk to Mark Taylor and Geoff Marsh and met all the other members of the team and they saw the first Test as a challenge and I think their frame of mind is splendid. They recognise that England's playing above what it did the last couple of years and that's important because obviously it is, but they're also very confident and Mark Taylor's personal return to form is not only a source of immense pleasure to him and to me and millions of Australians but also obviously a great morale booster for the whole team so they were in pretty good shape. They were just a bit frustrated that this (*the rain*) has been bunged on by the English to deny them a good start.

JOURNALIST:

Do you think it's somewhat ironic that the cricket has been the cause of such controversy back in Australia and you may not get to see any play?

PRIME MINISTER:.

Well, it had crossed my mind ...but five days - you have to be a bit flexible with these things.

JOURNALIST:

So you might be able to come back?

PRIME MINISTER:.

I've never said I wouldn't come back but I've got a lot of work to do. I'm seeing Mr Blair this afternoon and I've a number of things to do over the weekend but I would be very disappointed and it would be very strange indeed if I didn't see a few overs and it's a modest incorporation into an otherwise busy trip. I think Australians expect their Prime Minister to barrack for their team when he's overseas and he happens to be in the same city at the same time - he'd be a very odd bloke if he didn't do so.

JOURNALIST:

Did Mark Taylor tell you he appreciated you coming here to watch?

PRIME MINISTER:

I'm sure the team appreciates the Prime Minister of their country visiting them whoever that person happens to be. Sport transcends politics in Australia. It always has and I hope it always does and I think

it's part of the job to represent the feelings of an entire community directed towards their representative sporting teams. He's a great Australian captain and a great bloke - he's also a constituent of mine.

JOURNALIST:

So you don't have a problem with Kim Beazley coming out to watch the cricket?

PRIME MINISTER:

None at all. I think it's a question of being mature. I have never criticised people - I don't remember having criticised people going to sporting events. Bob Hawke did it. Bob Menzies did it. My immediate predecessor didn't do it so much because he had different interests, but that was his right, so I don't criticise that. I happen to love cricket. I also love a lot of other sports and I think it's part of the thing. ... Kim Beazley likes cricket and good luck to him, I hope he does go to the fourth test or the third or whatever, and we'll do everything we can to facilitate it.

JOURNALIST:

Do you think Pauline Hanson likes cricket - it's an imported game!

PRIME MINISTER:

I can't handle that Laurie. I really can't handle that. But Tony Blair's a great soccer man. That's his great love.

JOURNALIST:

The forecast is for even heavier rain over the next few days. Do you think you'll actually ever see any cricket at all?

PRIME MINISTER:

Russell, don't depress me! I'm really very depressed at the prospect. Can't you say something positive? Given that Lords is such a great -- Englishmen haven't won here for 63 years - you'd have to go back to 1934 so I think it's a good omen for us anyway.

JOURNALIST:

And you're looking forward to your talks with Tony Blair?

PRIME MINISTER:

I certainly am. I'm looking forward to meeting him, he's a very interesting new leader and he's obviously got the nation behind him as a new leader and I'll be interested in the ballot on the other side of the House too.

JOURNALIST:

Will you be inviting Mr Blair to come to Australia as soon as he can?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, I'd love him to visit Australia. I think the question of whether I issue an invitation is something that he should hear about first. He's no stranger to Australia. Of course he's been to Australia on a number of occasions and he has had good friendships on his side of politics during his student days but he'd be very welcome. I certainly won't let any perceived political differences get in the way of forging a very strong personal relationship. One of the ironies is that for most of the time the conservatives were in power in Britain we had a Labor government in Australia and it may well be that for most of the time the Labor Party's in power in Britain there'll be a Liberal government in Australia. So I'm interested in fostering the bilateral relationship and it's important that that be done, particularly in the sort of period in which we live.

JOURNALIST:

Do you have any advice for the Tory leadership contestant?

PRIME MINISTER:

No, if I did I'd give it privately. I'll be seeing the current Conservative Party leader and his predecessor over the weekend.

JOURNALIST:

And will you be able to meet the new Opposition Leader when he's elected?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, if he's got -- if he wants to come and have a chat, that would be a matter for him. It's not part of the programme but you never know, these things can happen on the spur of the moment.

JOURNALIST:

Will you be downgrading diplomatic ties with the MCC as a result of today?

PRIME MINISTER:

Glenn, don't tempt me.

ends