

CRICKETERS CLUB OF N.S.W. - SHEFFIELD TEAM DINNER,
HELD AT SYDNEY ON 18TH AUGUST, 1962

Speech by the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. R. G. Menzies

Sir, I think it is quite ridiculous for me to interrupt a programme so full of gaiety. I am entirely willing to resign instantly in favour of Jim Burke. (Laughter) And not politically. (Laughter) But I've been enjoying this.

As a matter of fact, when he said that the light-meter showed zero minus .5 or whatever it was, it reminded me at once of a time when I was in England and, oddly enough, went to a Test Match (Laughter). I arrived in London. I told my wife and my daughter who were with me that they could enjoy themselves in their own fashion in London, but I was off to Trent Bridge the following day and I stayed en route at Coventry and the next morning I was driven up to Trent Bridge. This was the time when Lindsay Hassett made a century, but that was before I arrived and Alec Bedser was having a wonderful time. And all the way from Coventry to Nottingham, the drizzle came down; the little bits of fog hung on the bushes on the side of the road. When I arrived at Trent Bridge, at about 11, it was so dark you could hardly see the other side of the street. I was received very courteously by the President of the Club who was the Duke of Portland whom I have known in his earlier manifestation before he became the Duke and those of you who remember the present Duke of Portland will know that he is a stage Duke - you know, he says exactly what you would expect a stage Duke to say (Laughter).

He couldn't have been more civil. He took me upstairs into a room and there was a little balcony outside it looking across the ground and he said to me, knowing that I was an Australian, "Would you like a drink, what?" and I said, "Well, not normally at this time of the morning, but what did you say, Sir?" and he said, "Would you like a drink?" "Well," I said, "on the whole, I think I will." (Laughter) He accommodated me with a drink and then I went and peered over the little balcony. You could tell that there were people there on the other side, but there was no distinction of faces or anything of that kind. There were two melancholy-looking piles of sawdust; it was as dark as a dog's mouth, you see. And at a quarter past eleven, refreshed suitably, I said, "You know, Duke, I seem to be unlucky because I did hope to see the play today and on Monday, and I have no hope. He said, "What do you mean, what?" (Laughter) "Well," I said, "when do you expect play to begin?" He said, "Half past eleven, what", you see. And I said to him, "It's twenty past eleven and you really can't see the other side of the ground." I said, "In Australia, there wouldn't be any play under these conditions," and he looked at me with ducal contempt (Laughter) and said, "My dear fellow, if we didn't play in this light at Trent Bridge, we'd never play at all." (Laughter) And sure enough, at 11.30 out came the English fieldsmen and disappeared into the murk (Laughter) and out came a procession of Australian batsmen and they disappeared into the murk (Laughter). They reappeared pretty quickly. I always remember poor Neil Harvey, that lovely batsman, just doing one of those tucking-it-round-the-corner shots, and when he peered through the murk, he found he had been caught (Laughter) so he was off and by the end of the day the match was a mess. So after all this zero minus, this is a story entirely for Australian consumption.

I was also very amused - I'll come to the real topic in a moment - because I made a note of it here. Oh yes, somebody was talking about great feats of batsmanship and a reference was made by you, Sir, to Dainty Ironmonger. A fine bowler, but a batsman who, in my opinion, and I am speaking as a Victorian now, has always been gravely underrated. (Laughter) Because in the great year when Larwood was wreaking death and destruction and Dainty Ironmonger who was batting at the Richmond end came into bat, my impression was that he shut his eyes and dealt a stout blow at the first ball that came along and it bent the pickets at cover point. And this was a marvellous stroke. It was greatly received by the populace and, many years afterwards, I am sitting up with the great in the Committee box at the Melbourne ground, than which there is nothing more lordly (Laughter) and I looked down and I saw Dainty Ironmonger - I was going to say talking to Jack Ellis, but you won't misunderstand me - Jack was talking to him (Laughter) and I thought this ought to be fun, so I went over and butted in, and this interrupted Jack (Laughter) who, because he was a friend of mine and for other reasons, fell silent for a minute. This let me get in and I said, "Dainty, I have always wanted to ask you, when you struck that magnificent cover-drive off Larwood at the M.C.C. that day - you remember it?" and he said, "Too right" (Laughter) I said, "Now I want to ask you, as man to man, when you hit the ball, were your eyes shut?" and he looked at me and said, "Too right" (Laughter). Then, of course, Jack resumed the conversation (Laughter). A very interesting piece of cricket history I think.

Anyhow, my job tonight is to propose the Toast of the Team and this is very difficult for a decent, devout, Victorian (Laughter) to have to come along here. It becomes so painfully repetitive, to congratulate New South Wales on winning the Sheffield Shield, once more, once more, once more. And I want to say that although I am a great admirer of the team, I don't think you need excite yourselves unduly. There's one simple reason why you win the Shield, not entirely fair, but it's quite simple. You chaps win the Shield because you've got practically the entire Australian Eleven playing (Laughter). Well, of course, down in Victoria, we don't care for this. (Laughter) Not that we would replace you in the Australian Eleven, not for a moment, but we do occasionally pray for something to happen that will enable an Australian Eleven to have all its stars, or most of them, from Victoria and then the Victorian Cricket Association will snap out of it and give a dinner for the Sheffield Shield team (Laughter) to congratulate them on victory. And if I am still alive, which seems improbable (Laughter), I'll be there.

You know, it's a very good thing for Australian cricket that there is such a place as New South Wales. That's quite true. Politically, I wouldn't generalise on that matter. There have been times in my political life when I thought I could live without Sydney or die with it. (Laughter) But in cricket, you have in this State made the most tremendous contribution to what I will always maintain is the greatest game in the world. (Hear, hear) (Applause). There are certain mechanical reasons for it, perhaps. Would you mind if I suggested one or two of them to you?

I have always thought as the grand final of the football in Melbourne is conducted on a mud-patch, which not uncommonly happens, well on in September, and the following day they bring out the harrows and they run the harrows over it and they do a little top-dressing, they roll it out and

pray for rain and if it doesn't rain they water the pitch - you know. And after a while, people are playing cricket on it. But in Victoria, it's quite common when the first Sheffield Shield match comes along for interstate batsmen to be batting having had perhaps one innings in a Club match, whereas over here, by the end of September, the cricket bats are out - I see the boys on the spare allotments, I see them in Moore Park and therefore you are always able to beat the season as we see the season in the South. Now I am not complaining about that. This is very good because it means from the point of view of Australia you have a certain number of distinguished cricketers who are in form and in practice. Now that's a very good thing.

The second thing that I have always complained a little about is when people have said to me, "You know, the Victorian batsmen, they are very good, they are very good. You know, useful fellows to have in a side but a bit stodgy. I have even heard Jim Burke say that (Laughter) - "A bit stodgy, you know, a bit defensive" and I have frequently thought to myself, having looked at a number of cricket grounds here, that on the whole, yours tend to be a little smaller than ours and that is partly because of our particular game of football as compared with rugby. And I think that, psychologically, this has something to do with it because if the boundary doesn't look quite so far away, a fellow will have a go at it, but in the vast arenas of Victoria, he looks through the murk of the early Victorian summer and he says, "Well, if I can just push that past point, we might get a couple." Isn't that right, Arthur? But of course these creatures they just say phttt! and before you can say "knife" it has hit the pickets and it is practically self-fielded because it is so near the pitch. Anyhow, that's all just a bigoted, bitter, Victorian point of view. (Laughter)

All I know is that it isn't for nothing that you have the Sheffield Shield. It certainly isn't, because in these last years, in most of which critical onlookers have been saying, "Ah, cricket is not what it used to be" - you know, I hate those fellows. There never was anybody as good as so and so and so and so. All nonsense. To me there was never anybody as good as the fellow who is out there now, (Hear, hear) performing. Each man I am looking at and enjoying, and I hate these bumbling commentators who live in the past. It's a hateful thing. But here, year after year, you have been producing and showing the very backbone of Australian international cricket and I could stand up here for an hour and talk about eight or ten of them and never say a word that anybody would disagree with. But in particular, if you will allow me to say so, you have been able to make a remarkable contribution, internationally, to cricket because you have produced two people, Ian Craig and Richie Benaud, whose place in cricket history is, I believe, quite assured. (Hear, hear) (Applause) I have been a politico for a long time and I have had defeats and victories and large majorities and small majorities but if there is one thing that I have learned it is that the first condition of ultimate success is to produce a sense of morale in your team. (Hear, hear)

And if Ian will allow me to say so, this is his great contribution to modern cricket history in Australia (Applause) as a field captain, as a man who, in some mysterious fashion, almost magical fashion, always takes the offensive. I've sat up in my lordly box more than once and have watched him conduct a manoeuvre on the field so devastatingly good,

so aggressively brilliant that even before it succeeded, I knew that it would. This is something quite remarkable and it is made all the more remarkable because, unhappily, the cricket of our great opponent - and I hope always our great opponent on the cricket field - has tended a little to being defensive. Well, we are not to be beaten. And it is a bad thing to start off any contest by saying, "Well, I'm not going to be beaten." It is so important to start off by saying, "We are going to win" and this is the difference between defensive tactics and aggressive tactics and aggressive tactics have paid off.

And Richie Benaud occupies a place in the history of cricket not only as a New South Welshman, not only for this team with such success, but in the history of international cricket which I really believe is unique in my time, and if it is unique in my time, it is unique because he has always had the spirit of resourceful attack, studying every batsman who comes in. I saw him get Trevor Bailey caught by himself off square leg one day by a masterly piece of psychology. Because the moment Bailey came in - I happened to say to the fellow next to me, "You know, Bailey rather likes to tickle one quietly round the corner to get off the mark and the bowling won't help this and he'll get a bit fed up with it." This chap came in, flanked himself at short square leg, the bowling went on and, of course, finally even Bailey's patience was exhausted (Laughter) and up she went and there we were.

Can't be very easy to be the captain of a cricket team. I've been the captain of a political team for a long time and believe me, it's not child's play (Laughter) though everybody else thinks it is (Laughter) and, of course, that's true about the captain of a team. Everybody understands it, on the whole, rather better than he does but, at the same time, looking back over these years, I can't imagine a more just result than the one that we've been able to produce to you, the celebration of this enormous period of years of success.

I would just like to say I am very glad to see here tonight Sid Smith. I am sorry he's been on the sick list. I sit up with him whenever I manage to arrive at the Sydney Cricket Ground, tear myself away from the embraces of the Trustees. I like to sit up with Sid Smith and Tommy Howard and listen to the old and bold telling me about these matters and, as a rule, at the other end of the Committee box, there is a man called Webb. You know the chap Webb? He's a Q.C. (Laughter) An argumentative character if ever there was one. If somebody does a straight drive and it runs under the sight boards, he's quite prepared to say, "Now, if it ran under the sight board, but it didn't actually reach the pickets, would it be a four?" (Laughter) And he will argue about that for the next hour. I always refuse to argue with him.

I wonder if I could just, before I conclude, say this to you. There's an intimate association between cricket and the law. I am reminded of this by Webb, Q.C. I have had one or two very curious experiences in which my devotion to cricket has come not amiss. I remember many years ago when the late Sir Leo Cussen who was a very distinguished Supreme Court Judge in Victoria and who was President of the M.C.C. in Melbourne was down at a Test Match and I wanted to be there too, but a solicitor in the

country had taken an Opinion from me about four weeks before, about some problem of a by-law relating to bees and how far they were to be allowed to fly (Laughter) or one of those things that country municipalities love so much and I had written an Opinion and it said that in my opinion the by-law was invalid and that the conviction of his client was wrong and that he ought to apply for an Order to Review. An application for an Order to Review at that time, I think, in Victoria had to be made within thirty days of conviction and my country solicitor forgot about it. It was getting near Christmas and he forgot about the clock until the very last moment when he suddenly sent down all the affidavits to his Melbourne agent and said, "You must get Mr. Menzies to apply for an Order Nisi," and this was the last day. Sir Leo Cussen beamed at me and said, "I seem to remember, Menzies, there's a rule that if Counsel can assure the Judge that all the papers are on the file and mentions the case, the application will be treated as in time and can then be adjourned for a fortnight, is that right?" and I said, "Yes, Your Honour, that is precisely the position as I understand it." "Very well," he said, "I accept your assurance. You mention the case, I adjourn it for a fortnight. Get my Associate to make a note of the name, will you, if it occurs to you. In the meantime, isn't this chap bowling well." (Laughter) I always remember that with great pleasure. And could I, without wearying you, tell you another?

We had a County Court Judge in Victoria who had actually played for Australia, rather fleetingly, many years before. He wasn't a very good lawyer. He was a charming man. He had a rather pedantic attachment to what he was pleased to regard as good English and therefore he was occasionally difficult. You had one like that here in New South Wales. (Laughter) But many years ago in my County Court days, I knew that this Judge was devoted to cricket, chooks - it all came back to my mind the other day when I was dandling the White Leghorns down at the Exhibition - and roses, and it was very important to know what a judge's prejudices are, if I may say so, before you appear before him. So down from the country came a case for me; there was an argument about a contract and my solicitor produced a client who was as dull as a man could comfortably be. (Laughter) You couldn't get a consecutive statement out of him on anything. He was a decent chap. I've no doubt that, basically, he had the right ideas but you just couldn't get anything sensible from him and it was very troublesome.

We went up into court, I knowing as little about my client's case as possible, in consequence, and the plaintiff Counsel opened his case and he called thirteen witnesses and they were good. I cross-examined them with all the skill that I could command, but on the whole I thought they did rather well, and at the end of the day when all their witnesses had been called - I had no witness except this derelict client of mine - (Laughter) the Judge, the ex-cricketer, said to me, "Well, Mr. Menzies, you know, I don't want to discourage you, but I am very impressed by the case for the plaintiff." And I said, with that innocent air that I am thankful to say always characterised me (Laughter), I said, "Your Honour, I appreciate that, but I beg of you, Sir, suspend your judgment until you have heard my case. I am certain, Sir, that you will be impressed by it." And he said, "Certainly" and we adjourned. Then I said to the solicitor, "Bring that fellow down to my

chambers again, will you" and we had another session. I couldn't discover what he thought he was talking about, so finally I proclaimed my usual gambits when I was before this Judge. I said, "Excuse me, Mr. So and So, " - he came from the Bullarook Forest or somewhere near Ballarat, you know - I said, "Excuse me, but do you keep fowls?" He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Can you tell a White Leghorn from a Buff Orpington or a Wyandotte?" "Oh no," he said. "The wife keeps a few chooks but I wouldn't know what they were" I said, "Forget about the fowls. (Laughter) Second : Do you grow roses?" "Oh, well," he says. "I don't know. The Missus has got one or two, I think." I said, "Well, could you tell a Frau Carl - from a La Belle France, or whatever it is?" And he said, "Oh, no, come off it." (Laughter) I said, "Out with the roses." So, greatly despairing, I said to him, "Cricket. Did you ever play cricket?" He said. "Oh, now you're talking." He said, "I played for Ballarat and District against Ivo Bligh's Eleven." I said, "Ah, wonderful! What, 1882 or something?" He said, "Yes" I said, "Conference concluded, Thank you. Take him away. Keep him right overnight." (Laughter)

Next morning, I opened the case as well as I could, called my wretched client, who was all over the place and I finally said, "Well now, witness, I am going to ask you about the date on which this particular conversation occurred. And I know His Honour appreciates that it is not easy to remember a date. Now, of course, if I were to ask you to remember the date on which you played for Ballarat and District against Ivo Bligh's Eleven (Laughter), naturally that would be different." And the Judge turned round and said, "What's that? Is that right? Did you play Well, well," he said, and hitched around his chair and for the next half hour they exchanged ideas (Laughter) about this fast-bowler, and whether that spinner was really turning the ball, and my fellow turned out to have made twentysix runs - a very admirable innings, Jim, you know (Laughter) - and had taken a couple of wickets, and by this time, of course, I had sat down like the cat that swallowed the canary. My opponent, very properly, got up to cross-examine, and the Judge said, "Well, Mr. McGuinness, of course I want to make it clear that you have a perfect right to cross-examine this witness. I will be the last man to deny you your rights, but I think I should tell you before you do that in the whole of my judicial career I have never been so impressed by a witness (Laughter) as I have by Mr. So and So." Whether it was just or unjust, I'll never know (Laughter).

Sir, those two anecdotes are quite irrelevant to the task of the evening, but really, when I get among my friends the cricketers who have given me more pleasure than perhaps any other people in the world in a leisure that is not too frequent, I become a little reminiscent and a little talkative. I am indebted to the cricketers of my own time for so much happiness. I am particularly indebted to this magnificent New South Wales team which has once more won the Sheffield Shield and which, as it now stands, is probably capable of taking on any international team in the world. And that's a great performance. This is a great event and I have loved it and I want you all to join with me in drinking the health of the team and in particular, the health of this talented and courageous man, Richie Benaud, who captained it and who is one of the great captains in cricket history. (Hear, hear)
