



PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

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OPENING OF THE NATIONAL INDOOR SPORTS CENTRE AND THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF SPORT

Australians have often done very well in world competition. They have shown great talent as individuals and they have been great coaches. We had done so well for our numbers that many believed that this would inevitably continue - that there was some natural sporting superiority in the outdoor loving Australians. But then victories seemed to be harder, competition tougher.

Where we had excelled in the coaching and capacity, others studied what we had done, improved on these practices, and surpassed us. We came to know that victories in sport were harder to achieve, competition was tougher, training of our competitors was more concentrated and scientific. We had to decide whether we would let the world pass us by, or whether we would give our athletes full-blooded support needed for world victories. We needed world standard training facilities, we had to show Australia could offer as much, or more, than other countries. We want to entice our best athletes, our best coaches, to live, to work, to train in Australia.

It had been galling sometimes to know that for the lack of encouragement and facilities at home Australians might have spent more time coaching our competitors than Australians. Well, this indoor sports complex and this institute are a clear sign that we are no longer going to allow the world to pass us by.

This complex, this National Indoor Sports Centre and the National Institute of Sport are a clear indication of our determination to reverse past trends. Up until now, too many world class Australian athletes at the end of their normal schooling would have had to make the decision to undertake tertiary studies or to continue with their sport. There were no adequate facilities or opportunities to enable them to do both, as is common overseas.

The Australian Institute of Sport, established in close co-operation and arrangement with high class tertiary institutions in the National Capital alters all this. Here, young Australian athletes can pursue their sport and gain other qualifications.

Bluntly, we have provided the physical facilities. This centre enables 22 sports to be pursued. It has attracted world class Australian coaches. Don Talbot has returned from overseas to be executive director - a vital person excited by the prospects and opportunities of the Australian Institute of Sport. Kevin Gosper will be chairing the board of management. And David Dickson, former Olympian, will be directing the total complex.

I commend Bob Ellicott, on behalf of the Government, for his enthusiasm in pushing this project through to completion in only a little more than one year.

Here we seek to bring together, great opportunities for young Australians, guided by the best coaches that can be found. Youngmen and women will be given opportunities that are second to none in any country anywhere.

Some have already achieved great things for themselves and for Australia. These - Lisa Curry, Ken Lorroway and Tracey Wickham - to name a few, will be given greater opportunity to build on their early achievements.

In the past, Australia had some of the world's best coaches, Harry Hopman, Harry Gallagher, Franz Stampfl, Forbes Carlisle and Don Talbot himself. But the work has been made more difficult and they have at times been seduced overseas because of lack of encouragement and lack of facilities in Australia.

I hope what you see at this National Institute of Sport and Indoor Sports Centre will be repeated with the support of State governments providing greater opportunities for young Australians.

Coaches and athletes working together through this institute, will, I am certain, produce great things for Australia and carry Australia's name high.

On this Australia Day in 1981, I take great pleasure in declaring open this Indoor Sports Centre and the National Institute of Sport.