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PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
BICENTENARY TEST MATCH DINNER
SYDNEY - 2 FEBRUARY 1988**

When the first English team to tour Australia returned home in 1862, Roger Iddison of Yorkshire was asked his opinion of Australian cricketers. He replied (and perhaps Michael Parkinson, Geoff Boycott or Bob Appleyard could correct my pronunciation): "Well, I doan't think mooch of their play, but they're a woonderful lot of drinking men".

Over the next 130 years, Iddison's analysis turned out to be half right at any rate.

In Australia's 200 years of European settlement, cricket - and, particularly, cricket against the Poms - has played a major role in our social life and history. The enormous public interest shown by the thousands who attended the Bicentenary Test and the millions who watched and listened on television and radio is proof of the continuing vitality of a great tradition of friendly but intense competition between our two countries.

It was a wonderful idea to arrange the match as a part of the Bicentennial and to bring together so many great cricketers spanning the generations from Don Bradman and Bill O'Reilly - those great rivals from the Southern Highlands of New South Wales - to Ian Botham, the new star of our Sheffield Shield. I congratulate Alan Crompton and Bob Radford and their colleagues on the Bicentennial Test Match Organising Committee for their great efforts, and the ACB, the TCCB, the MCG, the Australian Bicentennial Authority, the NSW Bicentennial Committee, Benson & Hedges and all others who have been involved.

It is also a matter of great pleasure that the Ashes, which originated a mile or two from the SCG at Woollahra, have returned to Australia for the first time since they left here in 1883 with the Honourable Ivo Bligh's team. I note incidentally that, according to Jack Pollard's biblical 'Australian Cricket', "some experts have argued that as the series against Bligh ended 2-2 the Ashes should have remained in Australia, but Bligh took them home in his luggage ..." This shows that you should never trust anybody called the Honourable - or Bligh, for that matter.

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One of cricket's unique and great qualities is the literature, history and legend which surround it. The detail of all the Test matches between Australia and England has been lovingly recorded and I have taken the opportunity to refresh my memory about it, in view of the special significance of tonight's occasion. Radio and television have played an enormous part in documenting the game and bringing it to life for those not actually there. But we depend enormously on the written word. In the Oval Test of 1882, which gave birth to the Ashes legend, England, needing 85 to win, collapsed from 4 for 65 to be all out for 77. C.P. Moody describes the last over as follows:

"Now Boyle's pertinacious accuracy was rewarded. Off the first ball of his over Barnes was caught off the glove by Murdoch at point. Edmund Peate, last man in, swished the first ball to leg for two, flukily played the next one, tried to hit the last ball of the over, but missed, and it bowled him. The game was won by seven runs."

Cricket is surely the one sport where something as apparently insignificant as the three balls faced by a No. 11 batsman 106 years ago have been meticulously described and will be remembered in detail for all time. The unfortunate Peate's answer to the criticism of him for not giving his partner, C.T. Studd, an established batsman with centuries against the Australians earlier in the tour, the chance to farm the bowling, will also stand for all time: "Mr Studd was so nervous I did not feel I could trust him to score the runs."

There is a bit of a tendency nowadays to make unfavourable comparisons of today's game and its atmospherics with those of some imaginary Arcadian period in the past. For example, I've seen the odd reference in the media to crowd behaviour.

But it was in 1879 that the spectators rushed the ground after a couple of unpopular umpiring decisions in favour of Lord Harris's team against New South Wales. The day's play had to be called off.

And in 1873-74 in Sydney, during W.G. Grace's tour, a NSW batsman was persuaded in the pavilion that he had been unfairly given out, and returned to continue batting. With three batsmen at the crease, W.G. took his men from the field until sanity prevailed and the dismissed batsman departed. I don't think anything like this happened in Pakistan.

While on the subject of cricket history let us not forget that the first Australian team to tour England was the Aboriginal team of 1868. The re-issue of John Mulvaney's and Rex Harcourt's account of that event, and the forthcoming tour of England by John McGuire's Aboriginal team, which I am delighted to see has the support of Colin Moynihan, the British Minister for Sport, have helped to focus greater attention on the outstanding achievements of the men of 1868 and to give them the place in our history which is rightly theirs. It is clear, for example, that Johnny Mullagh from that side was a class player by any standards and one of the outstanding Australian cricketers to tour England.

Some of you will know that I recently had the honour of captaining a side against the 1988 Aboriginal team at Manly. In that match one of the living legends here, R. Marsh, broke a window in a house opposite the ground - while batting, I hasten to add. Notwithstanding the inspiration I received in travelling from Kirribilli to Manly along Murdoch Street, Bannerman Street and Spofforth Street, my own contribution was, in the words of a discerning 8 year old spectator, "a solid duck, Mr Hawke".

As I laboured vainly to get bat on ball, this innings of mine seemed to take an unconscionable amount of time. But these things are relative. And the proper perspective was put on them in the Sydney Morning Herald last week by Keith Dunstan. In a vicious attack on my profession - or should it be called an art? - Keith wrote:

"Surely the supreme agony of the 20th century is the broadcast of Parliament. Half the time our national leaders are indulging in mutual vilification in terms that you wouldn't want your children to hear.

Other times you get a session when they have gone into committee and they are discussing a water drainage bill or new rules for superphosphate, clause by clause by clause. It is the slowest human activity on earth beating those days when the English batsman Trevor Bailey used to manage two or three hours without scoring a run."

I was delighted to see Trevor, another living legend, and an outstanding cricket broadcaster, get a guernsey in the week of the Bicentenary Test, even one as unflattering as this.

There are great cricketing names here tonight, and I will have a few words to say about them in a moment. Let me briefly refer to the great figures of Australian and English cricketers who have passed on.

To pick a few names at random - batsmen like Victor Trumper; Clem Hill; Warren Bardsley; Charlie Macartney; Bill Woodfull; Archie Jackson; Stan McCabe; Sid Barnes; 'Slasher' Mackay; W.G. Grace; Ranjitsinhji; Jack Hobbs; Herbert Sutcliffe; Walter Hammond; Maurice Leyland; Bill Edrich; Ken Barrington - bowlers like F.R. Spofforth, the 'Demon'; C.T.B. Turner, the 'Terror'; Hugh Trumble; Arthur Mailey; Clarrie Grimmett; Jack Gregory; Ted McDonald; Wilfred Rhodes; Hedley Verity; Jim Laker; Bill Bowes; Maurice Tate; Bill Voce; Keith Farnes; - wicket-keepers like John Blackham; Bertie Oldfield; Don Tallon; Wally Grout; Dick Lilley; Herbert Strudwick; George Duckworth.

I did not see many of the men I have mentioned. A number of them were dead before I was born. But because of cricket's special qualities which I mentioned earlier, we feel a familiarity with them. Their fame will never die.

Nor will that of the Living Legends.

There are some wonderful cricketers here tonight and because of the characteristically whimsical, arbitrary and plain wrong decisions of the selectors not all of them played in the Bicentennial Test or the computer Test.

Tonight's dinner gives me the opportunity to salute 'Tiger' O'Reilly, great match-winning bowler, custodian of the shrine of spin, excoriator of the bouncer, Grand Inquisitor of one-day cricket, full of passion and, of course, always free of prejudice. We learned this morning that Bill is to retire after years of delighting, exasperating, but always stimulating, cricket lovers with his learned and fiery pieces in the Sydney Morning Herald.

Bill has always epitomised the highest standards of cricket and journalism. I will just mention two examples. Jack Pollard describes one of Bill's overs on the first morning of the Old Trafford Test in 1934 as "one of the most sensational in cricket history". He had Walters caught at forward short leg from the first ball, knocked back Wyatt's middle stump with the second, watched Hammond edge the third through Oldfield's outstretched gloves for 4, and bowled him with the fourth. From 0 for 68, England had slumped to 3 for 72.

The other story relates to Bill's role as English teacher and journalist. A former Australian player wrote to him taking exception to some of the comments made about him. Bill returned the letter, correcting the 16 errors in spelling and syntax.

On behalf of everyone here I should like to express our appreciation of Bill's magnificent contribution to Australian cricket and to wish him a very happy retirement.

For me it is a treat to see so many of the 1948 Australian team here. There are Arthur Morris and Neil Harvey, for example. In Canberra last year, I had the privilege of their company, along with Allan Border at The Lodge, on the eve of the Prime Minister's XI match against Mike Gatting's team. If we could have had Bill Lawry as well, that would have been a quartet of the greatest left-handers this country has produced since the Second World War.

I understand that Lindsay Hassett was 12th man for the Australian Living Legends Team. Can the computer tell us what the man who put a goat in Bill O'Reilly's and Stan McCabe's room might have put in the Australian team's drinks? Lindsay was a magnificent batsman and sportsman, a great entertainer on or off the field, a brave and skilful captain who won friends for Australian cricket wherever he played and a superb broadcaster.

We've got the legendary Ray Lindwall here, the most beautiful fast bowler I ever saw. It is very good to know that Ray's knowledge and experience are being passed on to members of the present Australian team.

And then there's Keith Miller. What a fabulous cricketer! When I think of Miller, I think of the SCG clock, not because it's finally going again after all these years but because Keith is one of those batsmen who might have hit it. Keith, of course, once hit Doug Wright on to the top of the old Members' Stand at the 'Gabba. In Sydney in 1946, he hit a ball from Ernie Toshack which was still rising when it struck seats in the M.A. Noble Stand, about five rows from the back.

On the subject of hitting, Alan Davidson once hit his fellow Living Legend Colin Cowdrey, on to the top of the old Brewongle Stand and drove the next ball on to the wall at the back of the Hill. Davo's eyes still light up when the subject is discussed. There are probably a few other batsmen here whose eyes might have lit up at the prospect of facing my old friend Colin's bowling

Richie Benaud has had an immeasurable influence on the development of modern cricket in Australia and around the world. His achievements with bat and particularly ball were superb, his captaincy brilliant and fearless, his concern to entertain the public unflinching.

Benaud's teams, with great players like Bobby Simpson, Colin McDonald, Norman O'Neill, Peter Burge and Alan Davidson, never knew when they were beaten and provided tremendous value for money. Following the dominance established by Len Hutton's teams, they got the better of some very strong English sides, including the likes of Peter May, Colin Cowdrey, Ted Dexter, Freddie Trueman, Brian Statham and Frank Tyson. Richie has been a passionate advocate of one-day cricket and, under his influence, the televising of the game has been revolutionised.

And the Australian Living Legends side includes three representatives from the latest great era of Australian cricket, the Chappell era of the 1970's. The great Lillee is still playing. Rod Marsh and I can vouch, having played with Dennis the other day - Rod behind the stumps and I from the safer vantage point of mid-off - that he has plenty of residual aggression.

Ian Chappell, tough, courageous captain and gutsy, brilliant batsman, looked very good, coming in at No. 11 at Manly, and cannot have missed out by much on a place in the Legends XI. Those sides also included outstanding players like Doug Walters, Ian Redpath, Keith Stackpole and, of course, Thommo. Greg Chappell was one of our most elegant and prolific batsmen ever. And I can assure him on the basis of my visit to Wellington last November that, while he will never be forgotten in Australia, he continues to be remembered very keenly in New Zealand.

Finally, I come to the Captain of the Australian Living Legends team, Sir Donald Bradman. The Bradman Albums and the Bradman Tapes continue to exercise a tremendous fascination, 40 years after the Don's retirement. His career spanned generations of great English bowlers, from the twilight of Wilfred Rhodes, through Harold Larwood, to Alec Bedser and Jim Laker. His run scoring feats made the wonderful achievements of contemporaries like Bill Ponsford, Stan McCabe, Walter Hammond and Len Hutton look routine.

There are very few figures of my experience of whom at it can be accurately said that words can not do them justice. But of you, Sir Donald, I can, and do, say fearlessly that no words of mine - or anyone else - can adequately capture the uniqueness of your achievements or the special place you have carved out in the history of this country and in the hearts of its people.

Last year, I had the honour of launching Don's Albums in Adelaide. That evening, like tonight's dinner, was a very special occasion. It aroused in me a sense of admiration of Australian achievement of the kind which I felt in opening the Tasmanian Exhibition in Hobart last October by Lloyd Rees, another Living Legend, and another great fan of the Don's.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you may imagine, the Bicentennial has been full of exciting experiences and impressions for Hazel and myself. The opportunity we have had this evening to dine with so many great cricketers of the past and present stands out as a very high point in a uniquely memorable week.

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