



PRIME MINISTER

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
AT THE ASHES DINNER
MELBOURNE, 27 SEPTEMBER 1989**

I am delighted to have been asked to join with members of the Australian Cricket Board and other distinguished guests who have gathered here this evening to pay tribute to one of Australia's most successful cricket teams ever to tour England.

Your magnificent performances in England brought an extra inner warmth to the hearts of your fellow Australians during the winter which has just passed and made us all very proud of you. At the outset I want to express my congratulations to the Australian Cricket Board, to Malcolm Gray and David Richards, for giving us the opportunity tonight in Melbourne to pay tribute to you. Sydney will honour you tomorrow.

But before I pay my own tribute, I want to pick a couple of political bones with the team. I've been asked by Paul Keating to point out to you blokes that your efforts in England have probably ruined the Government's economic policy for good and all.

Here we are, doing our best to raise productivity and develop an export culture in the consciousness of Australians.

How could we possibly succeed when, to judge from the slack, sports-mad mob who work in my office, for three months the work-force shambled into work late, pale, drawn and red-eyed - and then, instead of taking an aspirin and getting on with it, spent the rest of the day rabbiting on about Boonie's catch at short-leg off Alan Lamb, or Deano's six over long-on, or the one Merv ripped through Robin Smith?

The other thing we are trying to do is to cool the economy so we can lower interest rates. And what are you fellows doing about that? I am reliably informed that your performances have got sales of cricket gear booming again. Kids are rushing out all over the country to buy bats, to emulate Mark Taylor's cover drive, and six-stitchers that will move away in the air and nip back like Terry Alderman's. You've got the economic planners in despair.

I had the great pleasure of seeing the team play at Lord's on the second day of the Second Test and, later that day, attended Doug McClelland's memorable reception at Australia House, where the Australians and a good number of English players were also present.

I recall that Allan was a little worried that evening. Chasing about 280 by the Poms, Australia had faltered a little after a good start and was 6 for 270. A great deal would depend on how Steve Waugh and the tail batted the next day.

On that day, our RAAF plane flew out of London for Washington at 11, just as play was beginning. Over the last few weeks, the RAAF has given thousands of Australians reason to be grateful for their dedication and skill. I can tell you that on that Saturday in June they made about 40 Australians - the Prime Minister, his staff, his officials, and a group of journalists - truly thankful for the regularity, and the content, of their mid-Atlantic sports results service from the cockpit.

The mood on board charged from anxiety, to hope, to disbelief and, finally to sheer delight as we learned that Merv Hughes had got 30 against the new ball - disbelief indeed! - that Trevor Hohns had chipped in with a useful 20, that Geoff Lawson had played the innings of his life for 70 and, finally, that Steve Waugh was unbeaten for another Bradman-like 150-plus.

My other great memory of that Test comes from Washington on the last day. The critical final couple of hours play were taking place in London as I was preparing for my formal talks with the President and his Administration. I hope nobody tells George Bush but one of the more ingenious members of my staff had worked out that you could ring the Telecom cricket score service in Sydney from the telephones in the limousines provided to us by the US Government. I went into the Oval office to meet the President, privy to the very disturbing information that we were 4 for 67, chasing about 120 to win.

I would not of course wish to suggest that either I or my delegation would let our minds be distracted from important talks with our American friends by concerns over the fate of a mere cricket match. But Secretary of State Baker and his officials are probably still puzzled why at a particular point of the discussion about the US Farm Bill, the Australian delegates grinned, punched the air and muttered things like "You little beauty!" I can tell them now that word had come through that Boon and Waugh had just got the runs.

The team never looked back from that wonderful start, went on to win the series 4-0, and, but for the weather, would almost certainly have won 6-0. In doing so, they achieved a feat last performed by Bill Woodfull's team in 1934, and only on one other occasion - again by Woodfull in 1930, and on behalf of everyone here, may I say how marvellous it is to see members of the 1934 team among us tonight. A measure of the 1989 team's success can be gauged by the fact that the commentators continually reached for their history books to determine which record had just been broken and what the next one could be. Allan and his players did so well that Jack Pollard has put back the launch of the final volume of his definitive "History of Australian Cricket" so that their remarkable feats can be included.

Their individual performances will stand comparison with anyone's - well, nearly anyone's. Don Bradman put England to the sword in 1930 to the tune of 974 runs at an average of 139. It would of course be sacrilege for any subsequent Australian player to aspire to surpass this record but, for a while, Mark Taylor gave the aggregate a shake and Steve Waugh fell just short of the Don's average. As Phil Derriman has pointed out in today's press, Waugh got his runs a shade faster than Bradman in 1930.

The top six - Mark Taylor, Geoff Marsh, David Boon, Allan Border, Dean Jones and Steve Waugh - performed with superb consistency and, equally importantly, provided bright and aggressive batting throughout the series.

We saw the astonishing effort of Taylor and Marsh breaking the opening partnership record for Australia-England Tests of the legendary Jack Hobbs and Wilfred Rhodes, which had stood since 1912.

The bowlers were also superb. Terry Alderman's second haul of over 40 wickets in an Ashes series was a truly wonderful effort. It had to be, to win the Man of the Series award against all those high-scoring batsmen.

It was very good to see Geoff Lawson back in top form, bowling with fire and cunning. Merv Hughes took important wickets when they were needed. I got a lot of pleasure in seeing Trevor Hohns show that there is a role for good leg-spin bowling even in England.

Ian Healy played his part by hanging on to every chance which came his way and, most importantly, the fielding and catching of Border's team were in the best tradition of Australian cricket.

It was obviously important that the other touring players - Greg Campbell, Tim May, Tom Moody, Carl Rackeman, Mike Veletta and Tim Zoehrer - performed well throughout and, however frustrating it must have been to watch the Tests from the rooms, still contributed by their support and competitiveness to the outstanding success of the tour.

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I also want to pay tribute to Bob Simpson and Lawrie Sawle for their work in preparing the team for performance on the field and keeping them such a happy and united bunch off it. Which brings me to Allan Border.

Over the past decade, Allan has established himself as one of our greatest ever Test batsmen, whose best performances have been put in when the going was tough.

The Australian captaincy came to him when the team was in crisis. Times have often been difficult since.

But, whether the team was on top or struggling, Allan has consistently performed with outstanding dedication and professionalism as a player, and his demeanour has at all times been one of courage, honesty and good sportsmanship. These qualities have won him respect around the world.

The delight that all Australians felt when the Ashes were won was enhanced by the knowledge that, of all the Australian cricketers to whom this supreme honour could have fallen, none has more richly deserved it than Allan Border.

Allan's leadership on this tour was outstanding, whether in the aggressive innings he played on the first day at Headingley, which set the tone for the series, the assured and purposeful manner in which he handled his bowlers and set his fields, or in the delighted but modest way he accepted victory, remembering to say a kind word for that fine cricketer, David Gower.

We wish you all the best, Allan, as you take this great side on to new challenges - Pakistan in Australia this summer, in what should be an exciting series and, before too long, the West Indies - I know from a recent discussion with Michael Manley, Prime Minister of Jamaica, that the team's performances have made a profound impression in the Caribbean. And, at a personal level there is the target of Sunil Gavaskar's 10,000 Test runs.

But whatever the future may bring, I am sure that you will treasure 1989 as the climax of a great career.

And I am delighted to inform those present that the Governor-General is announcing tonight that Her Majesty the Queen has awarded Allan the Order of Australia. I am sure that all Australians will congratulate you on this richly deserved recognition of your services to Australian cricket.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to propose a toast to Allan Border and his great 1989 Ashes team.
