



## PRIME MINISTER

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**SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER  
LAUNCH OF "THE HARD WAY"  
MELBOURNE - 9 SEPTEMBER 1990**

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Last night I attended the farewell for the team that later this week will present Melbourne's case to the International Olympic Committee as it selects the host city for the 1996 Olympic Games.

It was a tremendous night; our case for the Olympics to return to the Southern Hemisphere for only the second time in 100 years is a strong and persuasive one.

Nobody can predict the outcome with any confidence, but I do believe that Melbourne's bid will be hard to beat.

I will be doing my level best at the IOC meeting to have Melbourne come home winners.

As the history of the Olympics reminds us, Australia has been fortunate indeed in the quality of its sports men and women: their courage, determination and their sense of fair play.

Outside the Olympics, the same story is true. The greats of international sports like tennis and golf also include a disproportionate number of Australians.

And international team sports like cricket and rugby have always featured Australians, and have sometimes been dominated by them.

If Australia is a great sporting nation, then surely Melbourne is a great sporting city.

Just think of the spring and summer calendar of the AFL finals, the racing carnival, the Australian Tennis Open and cricket at the MCG - an annual feast for the hungriest of sports fans.

This all leads directly to one very important point I want to make about Harry Gordon's book, "The Hard Way".

When he invited me to launch this book, Harry wrote me a letter in which he expressed his belief that good sportswriting can rank as literature.

And he raised the question: has the level of writing about sport in Australia matched the level of performance?.

It is Melbourne's rare and extraordinary distinction to have invented, codified and developed to the highest stage of competition, its own brand of football.

But has the city that invented Australian Rules yet produced the master interpreter of its game? I mean, the person who can think and write about the game in the way that great writers have turned their study of cricket and - in the United States - baseball, into literature.

Generally, I think the answer to these questions is no.

Our serious coverage of international sports is dominated by foreign sportswriting. With local competitions such as Australian Rules, our newspapers and electronic media provide a good, detailed coverage of daily and weekly events but seldom do we read anything that could, in Harry's words, rank as literature.

Ultimately what we are celebrating today is that in Harry Gordon, Australian Rules does have a writer who can capture on the printed page something of - a great deal of - the surpassing qualities of this game.

Hawthorn fans will love this book because it is a loving, detailed and eloquent testimony of the hard times and the glory days of your own club.

But as anyone who knows Harry will appreciate, this is not a cheap or one-sided piece of club propaganda.

It's a serious book for anyone who loves sport - not just Australian Rules.

It tells the achievements of the game as a whole - its glorious roots deep in the history and psyche of this city and its tremendous prospects as the uniquely Australian national game.

As the Coodabeen Champions would say, Harry Gordon's book is "good for football".

It tells how a team of easy-beats called the Mayblooms became the unqualified success story of the 1980s.

In the old days, as Harry says, Hawthorn was "a yardstick of failure, and to barrack for Hawthorn was generally an inherited condition, one which invited derision mostly, but sometimes sympathy".

Somewhere along the way, the Mayblooms shrugged off their losing ways and their ridiculous name, and became the power side that other teams today frankly try to emulate.

As Harry says, the story of that transformation needs to be explained, not just recounted.

How did they do it? To steal Harry's phrase, they did it "The Hard Way".

Now there are many reasons why I was asked to, and am happy to, launch this book: its worthy topic; its justly renowned author; maybe because in the Family Club, any Hawke is welcome.

But there may be a more complicated reason.

Far be it from me to inject a note of politics into this function, but I couldn't help thinking about a few parallels between the Hawthorn resurgence and that of a certain political party.

In the bad old days, Hawthorn lost 27 games in a row in 1928-29, and 22 straight in 1950-51.

If there is any parallel in politics to that, it has to be Labor's record of defeat: 23 years straight (1949-1972) at the Federal level, and 27 years straight in Victoria (1955 to 1982).

Somewhere out in their respective wildernesses reserved for perennial losers, Hawthorn and the Australian Labor Party got sick of the ashen taste of defeat, and decided to learn how to win.

The result for Hawthorn is now in the record books: Hawthorn, unambiguously the team of the 1980s, with seven consecutive grand final appearances culminating last year in that tremendous game against Geelong giving you your first back-to-back flags.

By coincidence, the years of Labor's supremacy almost overlap with Hawthorn's.

Or, to put it another way, the seven years of the Hawks in the Grand Finals have been the seven years of the Hawkes in the Lodge.

So in launching this book, I do want to wish you every success for many Grand Final appearances to come!

Which brings me to season 1990, and the big task that lies in front of the Hawks today.

My Cabinet colleagues Gareth Evans and Brian Howe have not been their normal relaxed selves of late - a fact which I attribute to Hawthorn's unusually tenuous hopes of an eighth successive Grand Final.

As everyone knows, winning the flag from fifth would be an unprecedented achievement.

Which means, I suppose, that Harry Gordon is the only historian who wants his history book to be almost immediately rendered out of date by events.

In closing, let me just say that I have never been a Hawthorn supporter.

But I have always been a Hawthorn admirer.

There is a tremendous quality about this team not just its on-field courage and relentlessness, but its club values off the field of frankness, straightforwardness and sheer pride and professionalism.

Part of the Hawthorn spirit is that individuals are less than the team. So I am not going to name names - with one supremely justifiable exception. If you have played 404 games in the way Michael Tuck has played then, you have truly demonstrated that you know all about personal commitment and team spirit.

It's always been a matter of comment that, as Harry puts it, "somehow Hawthorn contrives to live simultaneously in the nineties and the fifties".

These are the qualities that, at the end of the day, set Hawthorn apart.

And perhaps - since an explanation is needed for Hawthorn's success on the field - these are the qualities that explain it.

These are the certainly the qualities praised and commemorated in this book, and that is why it is such a pleasure to launch Harry Gordon's book "The hard Way".