



PRIME MINISTER

EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY (8.30 PM, 19 MARCH 1992)

ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING, MP
PRIME MINISTERIAL WOMEN AND SPORTS AWARDS
THE REGENT MELBOURNE

Thank you very much. It's my great pleasure to be here.

You will have probably heard me say on the odd occasion that I want to see Australia become more competitive in the world.

It has been one of my ruling passions for the past decade.

More recently you may have heard me utter the words "One Nation" - this is set to become a ruling passion for the next decade.

Competitiveness is an essential part of the concept behind One Nation.

Early in the statement you can read the following.

"The Keating government's goal is an internationally competitive economy that continually strives for world best performance and provides equal opportunities for all its citizens - one nation, co-operating at home and winning abroad".

Read in one context, you might take this to mean that I am about to give you another one of those boring economic speeches. And shudder. Or yawn.

But I ask you to read those words in the context of this gathering tonight.

The values we are honouring tonight are those of competition. They are also the values of participation and equity.

Tonight we are paying tribute to people whose personal ambition and personal effort lifts the national ambition and the national effort.

These awards are a measure of the value of the competitive spirit.

But the value of participation is equally reflected.

For the achievements we honour here tonight, it has to be said, have been made against the odds.

Take the Olympics.

The Olympic hockey competition which the Australian women's team won in Seoul was only the second to be held.

The women's marathon was not introduced until 1984. The men's was first run in 490 BC!

Unfortunately we can't blame it all on the International Olympic Committee.

Of the 76 national sporting organisations in Australia, only 14 have women in the top administrative position.

Of the 6.5 million members of sporting organisations in Australia only a quarter are women.

It has to be said, therefore, that to some extent our women athletes have done it against the odds.

Their achievements, of course, are outstanding.

For a very long time Australian women athletes have been at the absolute pinnacle of international sport.

Their successes are measures of ourselves - of our confidence, of our values. They are cultural measures.

Sport is one area where women can be numbered among the Australian legends - I mean the likes of Marjorie Jackson, Heather McKay, Dawn Fraser, Betty Cuthbert, Evonne Goolagong, Shane Gould. These names mean more than sporting success: each of them stands for character - for something which we identify as Australian.

The list, of course, is much longer than that.

And it should be said that any list of Australian sporting greats would have to include the hockey team, who recently beat the Germans, the cricket team who beat the English, and the netball team who beat New Zealand in one of the great sports highlights of last year.

Now a government cannot make people competitive - we cannot insist that our athletes become the best in the world, any more than we can insist that Australian companies become the best in the world.

But we can do a lot to create the conditions which will give us the best chance.

That's what we're doing with the economy and the industrial culture.

That's what we want to do with sport.

We want to broaden the base of the pyramid.

That means giving every Australian, regardless of gender, every opportunity to participate in sporting activities.

There is no better way to increase the numbers who reach the top - no better way to increase the chances for women to realise their highest ambitions.

But it will be just as important for those women - and men - whose sporting ambitions are more modest.

I mean those who want to play sport at any level of expertise or exertion - and I am not merely thinking of my own tennis - those who want to play sport for its social and recreational value.

Beyond all this, of course, lie the physical, communal and spiritual values which every nation needs and which sport is uniquely capable of supplying.

We should remember that, when we exclude women in any way at all from sport, we exclude them from sharing in the expression of those values - and, what is more important, from shaping them.

The idea of One Nation is the idea of inclusion.

The idea of closing gaps between places and people. Of building partnerships. Of making the most of all our resources - and Australian women surely number among the greatest of them.

In sport, as in every other aspect of our national life, it is our intention to lower the drawbridge - and let all Australians in.

There is more to do - there nearly always is - but in a number of ways, from broad social and economic reforms, to specific programs like the Women's Sport in Media project, the Gender Equity Guidelines and the Active Girls campaign, more and more women are finding their way into the national life, including the sporting life of Australia.

In this the efforts of my colleagues, Ros Kelly and Wendy Fatin, should not go unacknowledged. Both have been and will continue to be great contributors, great encouragers - great at creating opportunities and openings.

By recognising those individuals and corporations who encourage women in sport, and who create the opportunities, these awards play their part in the goals of excellence and

participation - which is in essence the goal of national growth.

I said that we want to see partnerships: tonight we see them between government and corporate sponsors, between community, media and sporting organisations, between men and women.

I want to thank and congratulate all those who have played such constructive parts in women's sport, and take this opportunity to express the hope that these awards will rapidly come to play their part in advancing the cause.

ENDS