



PRIME MINISTER

EMBARGO: 8.00pm, 8 May 1992

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP,

PRIME MINISTER'S OLYMPIC DINNER
NATIONAL TENNIS CENTRE, MELBOURNE
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Ladies and gentlemen

It is my pleasure to be here tonight, to welcome all of you, and to have the opportunity to briefly speak on behalf of a great cause.

We have a love affair of long standing with the Olympic Games.

Perhaps a little conceitedly, we tend to see our Olympians as a measure of ourselves.

It is therefore only just that as a nation we make a collective contribution. It is not too much to ask that we pay for the privilege of basking in the glory.

I think it's of some significance that the idea of the modern Olympics was born in the 1890s, the decade in which it might also be said that the idea of Australia was born.

The history of our nation and the history of the Olympics have run remarkably parallel courses.

The 1890s saw the birth of the Commonwealth of Australia.

More than that, it was the period when Australian men and women - writers and artists, politicians, visionaries of all kinds, ordinary Australians - talked about what sort of society they might build under the Southern Cross.

They celebrated what was here. The virtues of the great outdoors. The light and the space of Australia and the distinctly Australian way of life which evolved from that.

They celebrated the pioneering virtues of mental and physical endurance. And the great virtue of freedom.

They celebrated a distinctly Australian way of life.

They used words like "mateship", "solidarity", and a "fair go for all" to describe what they believed were the essential principles of life - and what, therefore, were the essential principles of a good society..

The ethos in Australia was different to that which evolved in another pioneering society, the United States - we tempered their rugged individualism with a much stronger belief in social equality. In the fair go.

The principles which evolved in this country in those years sat very happily with the creed of the modern Olympics.

Australians, still in the pioneering phase of their history, still in competition with nature, young and determined to prove themselves against the world, relished the idea of Olympic competition.

But there are other elements in the idea of the Olympics which I think also appealed.

I mean the idea that the important thing is not to win but to take part. That it's not the triumph but the struggle. That it's not to have conquered but to have fought well.

Above all, the goal is - to quote the Olympic Charter - to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practised without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair-play.

If you substitute the word "mateship" for the word "friendship", you have some very familiar Australian values there at the end.

Mateship, solidarity, fair-play.

It seems to me that the idea of Olympic competition as it was originally conceived, and as the Charter still insists, has much in common with our own traditional aspirations as a nation.

And perhaps that has something to do with the fact that Australia is one of the very few countries in the world to have participated in every Olympic Games since their foundation in 1896.

It has something to do, perhaps, with all of us being here tonight.

From the very beginning, we have been highly successful participants.

Australians have always been famously good at sport.

Here in Melbourne in 1956 we did so well I suspect we thought that there was none better in the world, and never would be.

It has not been so easy since of course.

Other countries, in particular those in what used to be called the Eastern Bloc, overwhelmed us - until the awful day came when we went to an Olympic Games and came back without a medal.

Our collective misery after this might have produced a panic reaction.

We might have lost sight of the main game.

But twelve years later I think we can say with some pride our response has been the right one - to my mind the very best one.

We responded with vigour and determination and, dare I say it, money.

In 1980 the team which went to Moscow received a Federal Government grant of \$800,000.

The teams for Barcelona and Albertville received a Federal grant of \$10 million.

Before the government came to office the sports budget was \$6 million.

In 1983 we increased that to \$36 million.

Last year it was \$68.4 million.

Let me say at once - never, I believe, has Commonwealth money been better spent.

Among many other things it enabled the completion of the Australian Institute of Sport, which is now pretty well universally considered to be the best of its kind in the world.

The money we have spent has enabled us to produce a whole new generation of young Australians to dedicate themselves to becoming world class athletes.

And many of them have become world class athletes - and that includes sports we never excelled before.

I think we can take the greatest pleasure from the fact that we have broadened the base of sport in Australia.

More Australians - many more Australians - play many more sports than they ever did before.

There was a paradox about sporting performance in the past - those golden years when Betty Cuthbert was winning gold medals on the track and Dawn Fraser swept all before her in the pool, the years when our athletes turned in consistently spectacular performances were years when most Australians were spectacularly unfit.

Spending on sport has played a major part in seeing our national health levels, particularly among children, immeasurably improved.

As I said, we have broadened the base.

We have done this through a large and strategic encouragement of sport off the Commonwealth budget, which has made sport and sporting facilities much more generally available to Australians.

The establishment of the Australian Sports Commission has been a boon.

At the same time Aussie Sports adapted traditional sports in ways which allow everyone to take part.

These steps have not only broadened the sports base, but improved the quality of our society.

They represent further progress towards the land of the fair go - towards both the Olympic ideal and the Australian ideal.

Such achievements don't thrill us in the way that Betty Cuthbert and Dawn Fraser did in Melbourne, or the sight of a Keiran Perkins or a Tim Forsyth winning in Barcelona will.

But as a country we should be proud of these achievements in the last decade. They are very much in the tradition of the Olympics.

I was impressed by a speech Shane Innes - formerly Shane Gould - gave at the Prime Minister's Women and Sports Awards in March.

She spoke about the terrific pressure sports people were under, especially because of the philosophy that says - "if you don't win, you lose."

True as that might be in politics, it is not true in the Olympics.

At least it should not be: though we all know that too often too many countries, too many athletes, have taken that as their motto.

I think we can take great pride in the fact that it has never been ours.

Every athlete wants to win - every Australian wants to.

But the real aim is participation: it is to strive to do your best.

In the Olympics it is very simple - if your best on the day is the best in the world, and only if it is, you win.

And your country will be proud of you.

If it's not enough to win, you've achieved what few others will ever achieve - you've competed with the very best.

And your country - this country - will be proud of you.

I think we should work to keep those principles in Australian sport.

They will serve our country very well. Our youth very well.

I think they're the key to a good society.

They will serve both the Olympic spirit very well, and the spirit of Australia.

I am also one of those who believe that they will see their benefits on the victory dais in Barcelona.

I thank you all for coming. For your contribution to what is a great national cause.

And most of all I congratulate those members of the Australian Olympic team whose hard work has earned them the privilege of meeting and competing with the best athletes from 170 nations of the world.

I wish you all the success - and the fun - you deserve.