



## PRIME MINISTER

**ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P.J. KEATING MP,  
TO THE NEW SOUTH WALES AUSTRALIA DAY COUNCIL LUNCH,  
25 JANUARY 1993, DARLING HARBOUR - CONVENTION CENTRE**

I am very glad to be here, and particularly to welcome our guests from overseas.

This very large gathering is a measure both of your patriotism and your support for Sydney's Olympic bid.

For it is an Australia Day celebration and a great sporting occasion.

There is nothing unusual about that of course. Sport and patriotism have long been virtually synonymous in Australia, and any Prime Minister who does not know his sport cannot expect to lead a happy life for long.

I won't boast. I will let my record this year speak for itself: I have addressed audiences drawn from a wide and eccentric range of sports, including Australian Rules Football, and I did it without causing the slightest embarrassment to anyone.

In fact Alan Border and Richie Richardson seemed genuinely startled by my knowledge of cricket - perhaps because they had read in the English press that I was Irish.

The fact remains that if Australians cannot be fairly described as sports-mad, they *most certainly can* be *unfairly* described that way.

For our overseas guests I should perhaps explain that our avid devotion to sport is believed to derive from a long and intense contest with nature.

In the pioneering phase of our national life we were in perpetual competition with the elements, and it is said that this translated culturally into an almost universal admiration for physical prowess.

It is also said that our fascination with gambling has its origins in the game of chance which the duel with nature always is.

That is how the story goes. In the great empty spaces in Australia, men and women and children had room to run and jump, and race their horses, and kick balls around and between gum-trees, and throw bags of wheat over fences and buildings.

It was a physical culture and, of course, a healthy one – which made our athletes all the more formidable.

It is also suspected that our urge to compete derived in part from our status at first as a colony, and then as a somewhat subordinate partner in the British Empire.

Such peoples – the New Zealanders provide another example – are generally determined to prove themselves on playing fields. And battlefields. And throughout this century Australians did just that.

Down here at the bottom of the world we're susceptible to feelings of inadequacy and neglect. It is important to raise our self-esteem by beating the best in the world.

So we have always made a great deal of what we do best: and it has long been said that what we do best is sport.

That there is still some truth in this is undeniable.

Last year we watched with great pride as, in Barcelona, Australian athletes won a swag of medals quite out of proportion to the size of our population. But we reckoned it was about the right number.

In the previous three or four Olympics we thought we did adequately when we did as well or better than other comparable countries.

In sport we expect nothing less than to be above the average.

There were other sporting triumphs, the rugby union team among them. Like all other Prime Ministers before me, I could stand here on Australia Day 1993 and read out a long list of our sporting successes in the past twelve months.

But I won't do that.

Instead let me mention a few other medals won by Australians in the past year. Medals and awards in fields of endeavour for which we are less well known in the world. Fields in which usually we have taken somewhat less pride than we might.

But year after year Australian artists – writers, dancers, musicians, film makers, actors – take on the world and win.

Last year, for instance, a young Australian ballet dancer, Simone Goldsmith, won the gold medal at the Royal Academy of Dance Gence Awards in London.

Another Australian, Holly Smart, won it the year before. In fact Australians took all gold, silver and bronze medals in both years.

Last year a 26 year old Australian violinist, Ben Lca, became one of the very few foreigners to be appointed to what many people will tell you is the greatest orchestra in the world – the Vienna Philharmonic. Ben's twin brother, Toby, is principal solo viola with La Scala.

Last year an Australian, Jackie Farkas, won the world's largest prize of \$250,000 for a student film at the International Cinema Students Festival in Tokyo. While another young Australian, Stavros Efthymiou was named Young Film-maker of the Year at the Edinburgh Film Festival.

In the United States, Judy Davis won a Golden Globe Award, the Los Angeles Film Critics Award and the National Board of Review Award for best supporting actress.

And last year a young Australian, Baz Luhrmann, won the Prix de la Jeunesse at the Cannes Film Festival for his film *Strictly Ballroom*.

*Strictly Ballroom* won a number of other prizes - and many standing ovations - around the world. It also won them here. And it was a huge box office success.

That, perhaps, is the most important thing - not how much we impressed the world, but the degree to which with our music, literature, opera, theatre, dance **and sport**, we inspired and amused ourselves.

I think all Australians should see *Strictly Ballroom*, including Australians who prefer sport to art.

They will like it if only because *Strictly Ballroom* is about competition, and sport - the most eccentric of sports - ballroom dancing.

It is also about all those pioneering virtues of perseverance, and faith, and hope, and rising above adversity.

The film is about the need for things to change, the triumph of youth over age, of freedom and self-expression over stifling conservatism, and of course the triumph of truth and justice over villainy.

It reminds me of my own life, fighting those conservatives.

"Strictly Ballroom" is a film for our times. Or any other times.

It is an Australian fairy tale, both on the screen and off it. The making of *Strictly Ballroom* required those same virtues of perseverance and courage as the film describes.

It is one of the curious things about patriotism that we all take credit for the success of a few remarkable individuals. When our athletes won at Barcelona we would say that "we" won them.

When our artists perform brilliantly overseas we say that they are "ours".

Of course, we didn't win those medals. Our athletes did. And it was not **our** talent or our perseverance which got their success in Barcelona or in Vienna.

Yet we **did** win. We won in the sense that their triumphs strengthen our faith in ourselves.

We also won in that their success was in some measure a return on the kind of society we have created here. A society which does not stifle hope or excellence, but encourages it:

- . encourages it through the creation of institutions like the Australian Institute of Sport, the National Institute of Dramatic Art, or the Australian Film and Television School.
- . encourages it through a commitment to equality of opportunity.

encourages it through commitment to the principles of cultural pluralism which we have followed in the past 20 years. For while *Strictly Ballroom* is unambiguously Australian, the cast and crew and themes of the film are nothing if not multicultural.

There will, no doubt, be people here who say that we do not do enough to encourage excellence. There will be some who say we do not do enough to raise the level of equality.

I can only say we do our best by both, and most Australians are agreed that this is at least the proper ambition.

So I'm inclined to think that, so long as we foster talent and ambition, when Australian athletes or artists win we have a right to say that "we" won too.

And, ladies and gentlemen, I would also say that if today we considered what all of us have achieved in recent years, we might begin to feel even more pride in ourselves.

Because what Australians have been engaged in for the past few years, and what will engage us for the rest of this decade, is a contest at least as great as our forebears' contest with nature, and much greater than anything which happens on a sporting field.

It is a contest, in one sense, with the rest of the world; in another, with ourselves.

It is the effort to transform our economy into one which is modern and competitive. It is an effort to re-direct our priorities. It is an effort to make an historic shift to Asia and the Pacific.

All this means transforming ourselves - our habits of mind and work; the way we see ourselves, and the way we see the rest of the world.

We will need those qualities which great athletes and artists have.

It will require confidence in ourselves, our institutions, our abilities and our strength of purpose.

It will require a mature sense of identity.

I am one of those who is certain that the great transformation of Australia will occur.

I am confident because I know what changes have already been made. I know what we have already achieved.

There has been a revolution in our thinking, and an irreversible re-casting of our economy.

Few countries, in fact, have moved so dramatically to restructure and rebuild.

Fewer still have determined on doing this without sacrificing those principles of fairness and equity which have always guided Australian democracy.

My point today is not to argue about who is most fit to lead Australia through the change. My point is that Australians have proved themselves capable of making it.

Today I could quote to you at great length the irrefutable evidence for this:

- . the rise in manufacturing exports.
- . the increase in those exports as a proportion of GDP;
- . the increase in the proportion of exports going to Asia.
- . the number of Australian firms who have in the past few years achieved international best practice.
- . the enterprise agreements which are transforming our workplaces.

This is not the place to make a speech on the economy.

But *it is* the place to talk about the Australian people, and I mention these things as a tribute to their achievements in recent years.

We are going through hard times. More difficulties inevitably face us. But I am in no doubt that sometime in this decade the people of Australia will be able to look back and say that, confronted with the challenge of securing their future, they rose to meet that challenge.

And I say that because I have seen it happening.

On Australia Day 1993 Australians need look no further than their own recent history to find their inspiration and their pride.

We will need help, and no doubt our sports men and women will continue to lift our spirits. And we will continue to see in them an image of what we would like ourselves to be - even an image of what we imagine we are.

We do see in our heroes an idealised reflection of ourselves, or at least a model for imitating.

An earlier generation saw it in the likes of Donald Bradman. At other times people like Dawn Fraser and Betty Cuthbert and Shirley Strickland have provided the inspiration.

Or Jon Konrads, or Rod Laver or Alan Border.

Or, ladies and gentlemen, Evonne Goolagong, or Lionel Rose or Mark Ella or Mal Meninga.

That last list could be turned into a very long one - the list of Aboriginal Australians who have excelled in the field by which Australians so frequently judge themselves.

As it is, the list of four includes two world champions and two national captains.

Four measures of our national achievement.

In this United Nations International Year of the World's Indigenous People we might look harder at the idealised reflection of ourselves.

And we might draw, perhaps, this conclusion: if we can share the inspiration, the pride and the patriotism of Aboriginal champions, surely we can share the feelings of those Aboriginal Australians whose inspiration and pride has been shattered, and who have no reason to feel patriotic.

If we can take pride in what the champions have achieved, surely the same pride requires us to take sympathetic understanding to their people.

If we can share the triumphs we can share the responsibility.

It seems to me that all great achievements begin with an act of imagination.

Out there at Bowral in the twenties young Donald Bradman must have imagined himself making centuries at the Sydney Cricket Ground – and somewhere else in New South Wales the young Bill O'Reilly probably imagined himself getting him out.

I don't know whether Ben Lea ever imagined he'd play in the Vienna Philharmonic, but I suspect he did.

And against all the odds, the young Lionel Rose no doubt imagined himself one day a world champion and a national hero.

If they can do it, we can.

I have a feeling that the solution to one of our great problems is, essentially, that act of imagination.

If sport can teach us that, I am even more for sport.

If the arts can teach it, I am even more for the arts.

If this bid for the Olympics in the year 2000 can teach us, I am even more for the bid.

And if the personal triumphs of the past year, and this bid for the Olympics in the year 2000, help Australians imagine a modern, strong, competitive and fair society, those people will have done their country a great service.

I see the Sydney bid playing a substantial role in the great challenges which face Australia in 1990s.

Whether it succeeds or fails might, in the end, be judged less important than the inspiration and confidence it gives us.

But like all Australians, I dearly hope that it succeeds – and I sincerely believe that it should.

Thank you all for coming and for the support you are giving this great project.

ENDS