



OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER
CANBERRA

The following text was delivered on behalf of the Prime Minister by the Hon Ros Kelly, MP, Minister for Sport at the launch of Evonne Goolagong's biography "Home - The Evonne Goolagong Story" in Sydney today.

7 October 1993



PRIME MINISTER

**SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP,
AT THE LAUNCH OF "HOME! - THE EVONNE GOOLAGONG STORY",
SYDNEY, 7 OCTOBER 1993**

Its a very great pleasure to be here today to launch this autobiography of a great Australian.

I have to admit that I felt some trepidation about doing so when I read in the book that Evonne was never too thrilled about politicians she didn't know making a big fuss over her.

However, I decided that it was worth the risk to put my regard for the book and its subject on the record.

At the very least we share one thing in common - our admiration for the British tabloid press and their ability, as Evonne puts it, to provide a thoughtful analysis of the situation.

Mind you, "Bold and brash, brilliant and booming" and "the new Miss World" are somewhat kinder than the headlines that I got.

But then, I wasn't a 19 year old Aboriginal woman who had just won the first all - Australian final in Wimbledon's history, in a mere 63 minutes, against a great defending champion.

As Evonne says, those 63 minutes were long enough to change forever the course of her life.

That life, which in this volume unfolds from the history of her family in the early part of this century to her present day rediscovery of Australia and her place in it, makes for compelling reading.

With the assistance of Phil Jarratt, it is told in the same way in which we remember Evonne playing tennis - with grace and dignity, with flair and excitement, with imagination.

And, most of all, with a sense of purpose and a palpable honesty.

Like other books of note, it can be appreciated on a number of levels.

You can read it, if you want to, as a fairytale story of a Princess - magazine type of a young girl from the Australian Outback who gets plucked from obscurity, becomes world famous, finds a handsome prince and lives happily ever after.

But that's not a unique story, even among tennis players.

And if you were to read it like that, you would be missing out on so much of what this book has to offer.

As Evonne relates, she's had and passed up the opportunity to make a movie, because she always felt something was wrong with a Cinderella script.

And she passes up that opportunity in this book as well - to our lasting benefit.

To quote her, "From 1953 my family lived in a white town, and from 1966 I lived in a white society, but the former didn't make us white, and the latter never made me anything other than what I am - a proud Aboriginal woman, a Wiradjuri Koori."

"Throughout my tennis career I now realise I stayed close to my Aboriginal roots: from my early days in Sydney ... through the occasions when I just could not go on with the tennis tour until I had once again sat with my people by the three rivers and felt the cooling breeze of their commonsense." That's a wonderful phrase!

Perhaps the most moving part of the book for me are the chapters dealing with Evonne's search for her Aboriginal identity on her return to Australia in 1991.

Where she drives across Battlecamp Range and has to stop and get out of the car because the realisation of the Battlecamp massacre of 1873 is so compelling. Where she returns to Wiradjuri country and follows her mother's footsteps - the Linda lines - that take her into parts of the country, and parts of herself, that she had never seen.

The story of Evonne Goolagong Cawley can be read, I think, as a story of our times.

A story where a young Aboriginal Australian is separated from her own people and adopted by white parents as the best means of getting ahead. Where she excels to the extent that she becomes one of the most popular and admired Australians, but realises, for all her success, that something is missing from her life. She finds it in her culture and identity.

She always came back to the same starting point: that her life story and her preoccupation with her Aboriginal ancestry are one and the same. That being an Australian champion and an Aboriginal Australian are two sides of the same coin.

There is a message for all Australians in this process of discovery that Evonne has gone through and written so evocatively about - a process that was not always joyful and which sometimes involved considerable pain. A process, nevertheless, which had to be followed through rigorously and honestly.

We can all be enriched by understanding and sharing in our culture and by identifying with this place - Australia. We can all be enriched by understanding and sharing in Aboriginal culture. And we can all be wiser and better Australians by honestly confronting our past and the tragedy of Aboriginal history since white settlement.

That is precisely the goal of reconciliation - the process that we are now going through.

Reading Evonne's book provides a good dose of inspiration to carry on with it.

And so too do encouraging signs from other areas.

I want to say in passing how impressed I was with the AFL's decision to highlight the contribution of Australia's indigenous people to both our national culture and to football at this year's grand final in Melbourne. It was clearly received with enormous enthusiasm by the crowd.

You have no doubt realised by now that I don't have a lot to say about the history of Evonne's tennis career or its many highlights.

Of course, I don't need to. Her deeds on the court are the stuff of legend, and her place in the history of tennis is secure. To have seen her play, even on television, is something I am sure no-one would be able to forget.

No tedious two fisted backhand, no interminable baseline rallies, and a sweet silence when she hit the ball. It is perhaps an overused phrase, but she was grace personified when she played.

People will remember Evonne for this, and they will remember that for Evonne, perhaps more than any other player, tennis was above all else, a game.

I should conclude by saying that one thing in the book which impressed me greatly was the amount of space that Evonne devotes to winning her two Wimbledon titles - less than a dozen pages in a total of four hundred.

That, apart from a true reflection of her modesty, seems to be also a reflection of the fullness and richness of her life.

Of this book we can say, as her father Kenny Goolagong did on the occasion of her first Wimbledon win, "Beaut, just Beaut".

To which we can surely add .. "Read it, just read it!"

Thank you.