



## **PRIME MINISTER**

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING  
RECEPTION FOR COMMONWEALTH GAMES ATHLETES  
AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF SPORT, CANBERRA  
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Thank you very much. It is a very great pleasure to be here in the AIS for this welcome home. One amongst many, I know, but one nevertheless very heartfelt. Because, for most of you this has been the place where that extra bit of tone and interest and commitment has made all the difference. But, it is a chance for us all to say directly, rather than through newspapers or motions in parliament, a simple thank you for the dedication and the commitment that you have shown, each of you, in representing this country with such distinction. I think all of us understand the enormous personal commitment an athlete makes to excellence - that doggedness, that sustenance...sustaining power when your body is telling you to stop, when you're wondering about your life's choice - when all those pressures are on you and you keep on going. And that is, I think, a mark of a champion and champions.

It is, as Jim said, sport is about excellence, and it's about a celebration of beauty - it's about a celebration of spirit and the human form. And it, I think, in that celebration, transmits so much to this country about what we are and what we have become. And no doubt, when you stand on the winning rostrum and you are saluted as Australians, it must run through your mind that you stand there representing the country and what it is, and I think that is we are proud of Australia, we're nationalists all of us, but fortunately nationalism has never got the better of us. And we have it in its proper place, but pride is always something that Australians deserve to hold dear, and one I know that if you are an Australian athlete comes by natural instinct - by pure instinct.

I want to say that I think it's a tremendously important thing for the Government to commit itself to Australian sport, because sport is so much of the ethos and culture of this country but beyond that it is a celebration of young Australians, of what most people in their youth are capable of. And even those not so youthful. But the fact is, I am delighted that we have been able to build - all of us - an Institute of this standing because, Jim said earlier,

that I think the institute is an important body in world terms - the fact is, there is probably nothing better than this in the world. There may be things its equal, but there is certainly nothing better. And it's a great tribute to the coaches, to the sport scientists, the support staff, and to the Director - Deek - for the tremendous job which the AIS has done on this occasion. I think something - I've got some statistics here - in the sports with an AIS program, 87% of our medal winners were receiving or had received direct Commonwealth support from the AIS, and an overall two-thirds of the medal winners received direct AIS support. So, there are statistics, "statistics and damn statistics" as they say, but I think they are fairly compelling ones, so much that I think all of us in this room believe that they reflect the value of this effort. So, they are great results and let me congratulate you all again - the AIS and the individual members of the team. And I know that with the Olympics coming up and the Olympic athlete program, which I announced on behalf of the Government, we are going to make just that extra special effort to bring our athletes...to give them that world competitive edge coming up to the 2000 Olympics.

Now, I know a lot of you have had - since the Games - other welcomes home, other terrific performances around the world with the World Championships in other events, and while there is no particular welcome homes for that, let's congratulate you - those of you who have been involved, particularly AIS sports men and women in those world championships, and those other events for which you have created world records in some cases.

The main thing in all this is that what a great role model you are for young Australians. Now, I'm sure that everybody says that to you every time that one of these events are on, but that's true. And I think it's not just because you can excel at sport, or win a gold medal, but rather for your character and your personality. Because I think that if one goes back through the great sports men and women of this country, the thing that stuck by most of them - and to us as a result - is what fine people they have been, and what a great sense of joy their character has been to the country. And I know that when Lew Hoad died this year, I wrote to his wife saying how proud she must have been of Lew, and what a fine ambassador for Australia he had been. And I mentioned how Pete Sampras had said often that he was inspired by, and modelled himself, on great Australian players such as Lew Hoad and Rod Laver. He loved their style, their attitude and their manner - the aura they gave, not simply the medal or the win. And I think that is the point. In fact, Jenny Hoad wrote me a very nice reply, and I'm sure she wouldn't mind me relating a little story in the letter she sent back. She said, "Lew always felt totally Australian," and she told me a great story, "when Lew and Jenny had just married and were living in a housing commission flat in Sydney, the man living opposite approached Lew one night and told him his wife had just had a daughter, and would like Lew to be the Godfather, but they couldn't decide on what to call it. And Lew said, "Well, I have just seen a great movie, and there's a good name in the film for a baby - call it Shane." And she later became one of Australia's great sporting heroes - Shane Gould. So, it just shows you that these sporting connections weave the most unlikely stories.

But the fact of the matter is that great sports people do become icons for the country - not simply sporting icons - and the Lew Hoads of this world and other great sports men and women obviously are going to do that , as many of you are now doing. So, could I just say thank you most sincerely for your efforts in Victoria. It's a great pleasure, I'm sure, for Jim Ferguson and Deek, and all of the people in AIS who are committed to you, to see these efforts actually be rewarded, but most particularly, that of course would all go to nought if it weren't for your grit and determination - that instinct to press on when a lot of things are telling you that time is up. And I think it is that leadership and that strength and courage, and that strength of conviction which we all salute. As Australians we all owe you a great debt - this is our most successful Commonwealth Games ever and I am sure on behalf - not simply of those in the ACT - but on behalf of the nation in general - thank you sincerely one and all for a great effort for Australia.

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