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# PRIME MINISTER

6 December 1996

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER  
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP  
OFFICIAL OPENING OF AUSTRALIAN CRICKET HALL OF FAME  
MELBOURNE CRICKET GROUND**

E & OE .....

Thank you very much Tony; to Dr Lill; to Dennis Lillee and Keith Miller; to the other family members of the other, the other eight members of this unique band of cricketing brothers; to Tom Reynolds, the Victorian Minister for Sport. And I acknowledge the presence of three former Victorian Premiers: Dick Harner, Lindsay Thompson and John Cain.

Earlier today I inspected the restorations of St Patrick's Cathedral and I said to the Archbishop as I was leaving I was going to one of the spiritual centres of Melbourne, to the true temporal shrine and sporting shrine, not only of Melbourne but also of Australia.

I think without any doubt the Melbourne Cricket Ground is the greatest sporting arena in our nation and I think probably without comparison anywhere in the world. And it's a special privilege for me to be here today. Being Prime Minister has its ups and downs. Could I say this is really an up. To be here, to be invited to say a few words, to open this Hall of Fame is for me about the greatest of pleasure and privilege that I could possibly have.

I am a self-confessed cricket lover. Like so many people of my age, I started at a time when following cricket, at a time when cricket books weren't quite as prolific as they are now, and two that I read and read again and thumbed through repeatedly was that wonderful book written by Johnnie Moyes in the early 1950s called "A Century of Cricketers", which not only traced the story of many famous Australian cricketers but also English and a few West Indian, South African and Indian cricketers as well.

And I was reflecting as I watched those names go up that there's only one of them, and that's the last one, Dennis Lillee, that was not in that book, and the other one that influenced in a journalistic way my love and knowledge of cricket was one that was jointly authored by Keith Miller and R.S. Whittington called "Straight Hit" which was essentially about the 1951-52 West Indian tour of Australia. I have seen four of them - of those ten play. I saw Don Bradman play but once at the Kippax-Oldfield testimonial at the Sydney Cricket Ground in 1949. It was his last appearance at the Sydney Cricket Ground. At the age of 10 I was taken there by my father on the Sydney Cricket Ground hill.

I really saw a great deal as a young boy, a great deal of Keith and Ray and I suppose if I had - as a boy growing up following the game - if I had two heroes it was them, because their menacing combination, and I don't think there's anybody in the game we've seen who could turn it around so quickly as Keith in his capacity to take that sensational catch, that brilliant piece of fielding, that marvellous burst of speed and Ray of course was the consummate artisan when it came - that rhythmic approach to the wicket, I've never seen anything like it and it really was for me a tremendous excitement to watch them play in the early 1950s. Dennis' contribution to cricket in a subsequent generation has been absolutely massive and he and his colleagues of that era brought new generations of lovers and followers of the game.

I wouldn't have envied the challenge of those who had to choose these ten players. It would have been a formidable task and can I say that I don't think anybody could argue for a moment with any of the selections that they have made. But cricket is a magnificent game. It's more than that. It's a way of life to many of us, it is another religion. I don't know a game which keeps people together in a fraternity quite like cricket does. I watch cricketers of different generations, and the capacity to, because of you common love of the game, the capacity to spend time talking to each other. I never saw Bill O'Reilly play but I did have the privilege of meeting Bill on a number of occasions when we were watching matches at the cricket ground and the way in which the difference in age and generations and backgrounds were just instantly dissolved by a common love of the game.

I think Australia's sporting achievements are something of which all of us are incredibly proud. As cricket lovers and cricket followers today, the contribution that these ten magnificent players and their fellow players of their respective eras have made to enriching the lives and bringing happiness and pleasure to so many millions of Australians can never be properly described.

And can I say to all of those who are here today, in the case of Keith and Dennis as recipients of this rare honour and in relation to the others as close relatives of the other eight men that have been inducted, can I say on behalf of a very grateful Australian nation, thank you for what you have done for a magnificent game. Thank you for what you have done to promote the best traditions of Australian sportsmanship, and thank you for the joy and pleasure that you and yours have brought over more than a century to millions of Australians and to millions of people around the world who love the game of cricket.

Can I say again what a tremendous privilege it is to be here today to honour this great game and to honour these ten great men, and I have very great pleasure in declaring the cricketing hall of fame open.

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