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3 March 1997

**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
ADDRESS AT THE NORMAN MAY OAM TRIBUTE DINNER
WENTWORTH HOTEL, SYDNEY**

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Thank you very much Gordon; to Michael Knight and Gabrielle Harrison; to John Coates, and most importantly of all to our guest of honour and the person whose long years of commitment to and enjoyment of and demonstration of the great capacity to communicate Australian sport, Norman May, ladies and gentlemen.

It's often said that if there is a national cement in Australia it is our great love of sport. And I can't think of a gathering that I've been to, certainly as Prime Minister, perhaps at any time, that has brought together such a cross-section of men and women that have thrilled us over the years. Every conceivable sport, just about, is represented here tonight. Some of the greatest names in Australian sport, in the Olympic sports, in our other great national sports such as cricket and rugby league, they're all represented here tonight and that is for a very good reason. Because there's a special bond between Australians and their sportsmen and that bond in most cases is via sports commentators.

When I was growing up as a young bloke in the late '40s and early '50s my connection was fought apart from my rather feeble attempts to play various games not very adequately. My real connection with sports was through those great sports commentators, firstly on radio and I have to say almost entirely at that time through the ABC. People like Bernard Koo and Brian McLenahan and Frank O'Rourke who described the rugby league, and of course the great Alan McGilvray and Victor Richardson and Johnny Moise and others, and the interstate sports commentators like Clive Harburg and Arnold Mewens in Brisbane and Adelaide - they were the people who first sort of put me into touch with sport.

And tonight is a reminder to me of how absolutely incredibly important the link between the sportsmen and women of Australia adore and admire how incredible is the link that is provided by the sports commentator. Because without the sports commentator the ability of men and women in the Australian community who love

their sport to relate to the achievements of their sporting heroes simply wouldn't be there.

And if you look back over the sporting achievements of Australia, the last 30 or 40 years, no person has occupied the centre stage in communicating the thrill of the experience and the excitement and the national pride and the sheer joy and the sheer pleasure more effectively and more eloquently than Norman May. And in doing that he's taking his place beside some absolutely tremendous sporting commentators, but he really has been the principal. And what has been quite remarkable about him is his capacity to communicate about so many sports and that's what I think marks him out from the others. You have the great cricket commentators like Alan McGilvray and we've had, in more recent times, great rugby league commentators like Ray Hadley and you had some great race callers over the years, but Norman May is unique because Norman is associated with so many sports. He will be forever associated, of course, with the 1980 Olympic Games. And we were reminded of that just a few moments ago when he bequeath some inaugural words to the long history of Australian sport and what a great excitement to have three of those four tremendous representatives of Australia in the 1980 Games here with us tonight.

But to be able, as one single sports commentator, to be able to hear the tributes from those three blokes, to hear what Tracy Wickham had to say, to hear Doug Walters - I don't think I've heard a funnier speech at a sports gathering than I heard tonight, good on you Doug - you were a great Australian cricketer and even more important than that, you're a great Australian personality. And of course the tribute from ???, a member of that sort of rare breed of the rare manifestation of sporting belongs to one of those great Australian sporting family where incredibly the genes are such that you produce two or three or, in some cases, even four Australian or world champions in a particular sport.

So Norman you have achieved something that no other sports commentator in the history of Australian sport has achieved. You have achieved a versatility, you have achieved a capacity to relate across all of the sports and a capacity to communicate to all Australians in something that they all instinctively love and they all instinctively enjoy. And it's been a great privilege to share this night with you. And I'm very grateful that you've been able to keep me fully informed as time has gone by - the cricket score in South Africa - I haven't heard anything though since the resumption after lunch. I hope somebody will get be informed about that after I've sat down.

Norman, on behalf of a very grateful sports loving nation and from the lips of a sports loving Prime Minister can I say thank you for what you've done for Australian sport. Thank you for all your selfless, prodigious, sacrificing efforts for no personal reward other than the enjoyment of doing something good for other people for the tremendous fundraising efforts to which you've committed yourself over such a very, very long period of time. And having said all of that I would like you to come forward because I want to make a very small presentation - well, it's not so small - a presentation to you which I hope expresses the affection, the gratitude and the admiration for what you've done and for the privilege of knowing you and your contribution to Australian sport.