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**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
ADDRESS AT ASHES EXHIBITION - LONDON**

E&OE.....

Thank you very much Neal Blewett, the Australian High Commissioner in Britain, to Sir Roger Carrick, the British High Commissioner in Australia, to Mark Taylor the Captain of the Australian cricket team and all of the other members of the team, former players and captains of both England and Australia, cricket lovers, ladies and gentlemen.

As you know, one of the great laments of travelling politicians and travelling Prime Minister is that every so often because of a sense of duty and a sense of obligation you have to go to a function for which you have no enthusiasm. You are sort of dragged around and you look at all these things in the wall and you mutter to your wife why is it that it has come my lot to go to such a boring occasion. Of course, you will know that that is not my lot tonight.

You will know that it is my immense pleasure as a self-confessed cricket lover and self-confessed devotee of the intensity and the passion of the Anglo-Australian cricketing contest, that I am here tonight to launch this magnificent exhibition.

Of course, as a measure of how important cricket has been in the Australian national psyche it is worth remembering that we had the first Australian cricket team formed 26 years before Federation. The first of the great Ashes Tests was in 1877 and the first Australian cricket team, an Aboriginal team, visited the United Kingdom some twelve years before that. So, however you look at the history of Australia, however you look at the history of the relations between our two countries you will find etched very deeply in that history and very deeply in that relationship you will find the game of cricket. And if anybody who has a passion for cricket wanted somewhere to indulge themselves, I mean what I think I would like to organise with the High Commissioner is that in the dead of night, perhaps at 3 o'clock tomorrow morning, when there is nobody else around, I can arrange a special viewing and you could literally spend hours going through this exhibition.

I do want to thank those who have been responsible for it. And in doing that can I say how terrific it is to have two former captains of England. I have seen at least two former captains of England tonight in Colin Cowdrey and Ted Dexter. It really is terrific to have them here. Can I say on behalf of all of the Australians present how much we are pleased to have so many representatives of English cricket with us tonight.

The sporting contest between Australia and England in cricket is probably the oldest and most frequented of all national rivalries in sport anywhere in the world. If there is another one I would like to know. None of my research suggests that it is the case.

It has been an incredibly intense rivalry. There have been 58 Ashes series of which Australia has won 30 and England has won 28. In England, there have been 135 tests played, 38 each have been won respectively by England and Australia and 59 have been drawn. I hope that those figures have been adjusted for yesterday's result.

It is of course, I guess the apex of sporting rivalry and sporting exchange between our two countries and game has in its different ways expressed the contrasting and the blending and very distinctive characteristics of our two peoples. The independence, the innovativeness and the creativity of Australians. The unbelievable, the incredulity that anything so dreadful could happen, which leads of course to that famous expression, when the first defeat of England on English soil was inflicted by an Australian team and the ashes of English cricket were to be cremated and the remains sent to Australia, it epitomised I guess the imperial disdain that a mere bagatelle of colonials could possibly achieve such a magnificent outcome.

Of course, it is not only the great contest. I will not insult your own passion and understanding of the game and the rich resources that are around this rich exhibition to tell you of them. To touch on any of them myself. It is not only the incredible performances and the achievements and we all have our own memories going back to the first time that we heard or saw a test match between England and Australia. Mine was in 1946 when Hammond brought his team to Australia immediately after the war. That was my very first contact through the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

But it is not only the players and the contest. It is also the culture and all that has gone with the game. The tremendous contribution and the improvisation in the early days of cricket broadcast, and the contribution that great broadcasts that both England and Australia has made to that contest. And I guess most of all is the wonderful worklike fraternity that has been spawned by Anglo Australian cricket matches. And what touches my wife and I so much is that so much is that you go to the fourth test in Adelaide on the anniversary weekend and you see a group of people and you come to the second Test at Lords and they are all here. It is a marvellous intermigratory exercise. So, as you can imagine, it is one of those aspects of the national and the cultural life of our two countries that does bind us together. And occasionally, given the ferocity of the contests and the passions that are unleashed, you wonder whether it is binding countries together or pushing them apart. Of course, there have as we all know, been stages when at various times things have happened in the contest which have imposed strains on the relationship. But it has survived all of that. And the game of cricket for all that from time to time people will quite wrongly announce its present, its benediction or announce that it is over and it is a thing of the past it rebounds with might energy and might vigour.

Those of us who witnessed the 4000 to 5000 people lining the streets of Sydney to welcome Allan Border's team home in 1989 would have testified to the great passion that still burns within Australians for cricket achievement and cricket success. The

coming of the one day game changing cricket forever. But it has not altered the essential principles of the game and it has given a new dimension and it has dragged a new audience and made cricket a new reality and a new joy to new generations of people, not only in England and Australia, but all around the world.

Can I say that it is one of the highlights of my visit overseas. Indeed, one of the highlights of my Prime Ministership is to be invited to open this magnificent exhibition. Can I say to Mark and the boys in the Australian cricket team, I think there was a little bit of a communication with the Almighty to which Neal referred. But if anybody here, if any Englishmen here imagines that your team is in any position of advantage just remember Gubby Allen's tour of Australia in 1936-37 when England won the first two matches, first two matches only to lose the next three and to see the Ashes remain in Australia. So let no Englishmen here, I say this with the greatest of respect and friendliness, let no Englishmen here derive any premature pleasure or any premature joy and out of what happened in Edgbaston and imagine that the Almighty can be called upon on four more occasions to snuffle a victory.

To my Australian and English friends alike, to all of you who are great lovers of the greatest game that the world has ever seen, can I say that this is an absolutely magnificent exhibition and I do want to thank Coopers and Lybrand. And I want to thank BHP, News International, British Aerospace, Rolls Royce and Holwaywide. I want to thank David Frith for the tremendous work he has done. He and I share another two things at least in common : a lover of cricket, and we were old boys of Canterbury High School in Sydney. I suspect he played cricket a little better than I did. We did have one great Australian cricketer as an old boy : Arthur Morris, who was captain of the school in 1939. I want to thank the sponsors. Without you this would not have been possible and the way in which you have got behind this terrific project is something that delights all of us.

So I have great pleasure Mr High Commissioner, in declaring this exhibition open. And may it be a, how shall I put it, a Mecca, a magnet for cricket lovers who visit London and who visit Australia House and a fitting contribution to the most enduring passionately engaging sporting contest of all time and that is cricket between Australia and England.

Thank you.