

12 September 1997



**TRANSCRIPT OF THE PRIME MINISTER
THE HON JOHN HOWARD MP
ADDRESS AT THE MARK TAYLOR TRIBUTE LUNCHEON
SYDNEY**

E&OE.....

Well, thank you very much David. To Mark and Judy and to their Mum and Dad, to Denis Rogers, the Chairman of the Australian Cricket Board and Australian cricket lovers all. This is one of those immensely enjoyable occasions for an Australian Prime Minister, it really is, and you know, you're in need of them occasionally.

Everybody has their childhood dreams and I had one fleetingly for a few months when I was about six that I might be Captain of the Australian Cricket team. It lasted for a very short period of time and then I decided to focus on politics. All my life I really have regarded being Captain of the Australian Cricket team as the absolute pinnacle of sporting achievement and really, the pinnacle almost of human achievement in Australia. And that is the sentiment that millions of Australians throughout my life have had and to you Mark, it is a tremendous personal pleasure to be here today to salute somebody who represents some great Australian characteristics.

You have ability, you have superb professionalism, you have enormous grit, you have great integrity, you have a capacity to fight back in adversity, you're a great family man and you're a real inspiration to sports men and women all around this country.

The statistics of your career are pretty well known. Suffice to say, that as a captain, only Don Bradman and Lindsay Hassett on a percentage basis have done better. You're number six in the total number of runs of all Australian batsmen of all time and you've been a great slip fielder. But above all, you've been a great leader and a great captain. You have endured criticism, some of it quite vituperous and mean and unAustralian, but you've fought back from that and your friends and supporters admire you immensely.

I remember the moment that I shared with you in the dressing room before the commencement of the rain-delayed Lords Test only a few months ago. You knew that we'd started not so well, we lost the First Test, the Englishmen had won the One Dayers and you knew you had a fight ahead of you. What I admired about your attitude then was that you were realistic. You knew that you were under a lot of personal pressure, although you'd done very well in the First Test in the second innings, getting your century that warmed the hearts of Australian cricket followers all around this nation.

But you were also realistic about the task that faced you. And of course at that particular time we were experiencing a brief moment of English cricket triumphalism. I happened to arrive in England just before the Second Test started and I got reminded of that by some of my friends in the media just about every day that I was there but the day when an Australian Prime Minister has got to apologise for barracking for the Australian cricket team wherever it is has not come, as far as I am concerned.

At that particular time, our erstwhile great enemy was feeling pretty smug and pretty triumphal and you knew that you, along with your team, had a great struggle ahead of you. But you responded absolutely magnificently and the leadership that you gave to your team, the inspiration that you gave to your team, as well as your own personal contributions, were really quite magnificent.

So as a man, as an Australian sporting leader, as an Australian sporting icon, and heaven knows, as we come towards the end of this century we need icons, we need people to respect for their human qualities, their capacity to acknowledge that they have valleys of despair and defeat and reversal as well as mountains of achievement, and you've gone through all of that and you've retained a great integrity and a great modesty.

It was terrific to meet your mother and father. I told them both that I saw their smiling faces at Edgbaston along with that your wife when you scored that great century and to have your family share those moments of success and those moments of triumph is an absolutely tremendous thing.

So can I say to you, Mark, on behalf of a proud and grateful nation, that you have occupied the greatest sporting post that this country can offer anybody with decency, with grace, with great professionalism and great skill. As one of your consistent supporters and advocates, I am proud to say to you on behalf of a very grateful nation, thank you for what you have done. Thank you for what you continue to do and thank you for what you will do in the future. I wish you and Judy and your two children every happiness and every success and on behalf of a very grateful Australian nation, thank you for what you have done for Australian cricket, a game we love with such intense passion and pride.

Thank you.

[ENDS]