

Charlie

Goffet

Address to Introduce the Guest Speaker (Kevan Gosper), 3rd Annual Dinner, Newcastle Boys' High School Old Boys' Association, 18 August 1989

Mr Chairman and Gentlemen

I must thank your Committee for being so foolhardy as to grant me the great honour and pleasure of introducing tonight's distinguished guest speaker. You will be surprised that I shall make no mention whatsoever of the fact that Kevan Gosper, after winning the quarter-mile at the Vancouver Commonwealth Games in 1954, gained a silver medal at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. If I went on and told you that Kevan was Tour Captain at the Rome Olympics, is President of the Australian Olympic Federation and is odds on to become President of the International Olympic Committee, it would be like a speaker at a Convocation of turf enthusiasts pointing out excitedly that Phar Lap not only won the 1930 Melbourne Cup, but went to Mexico and won the Agua Caliente Handicap.

And everyone knows that in the more serious world of business, Kevan is Chairman of Directors and Chief Executive Officer of Shell.

So, instead of reciting long lists of Kevan's achievements in sport and business, I should like to recall some of the lesser known facts of his career. Let me, therefore, take you back to August, 1946, the date of the Sydney C.H.S. Carnival. The star of our team was Gordon Jones, a past-the-post certainty in the Under-13 hundred yards. So much so, that we prevailed upon Harold Beard to invest the School's SWASC funds on the result. I think it was Len McRae who negotiated this deal, because I have always been somewhat chary of becoming involved in gambling. It was a disaster! Jonesy was beaten into second place by a handsome, smiling long streak from Canterbury High with the stride of half a dozen kangaroos rolled into one. The colour drained from Harold's cheeks when he heard the dismal news, but he recovered quickly enough to call a special school assembly and announce that SWASC contributions would have to be increased if the School was to provide the saucier photographs, pictures and other equipment needed for his sex education sessions.

On the following Monday, a new kid came to enrol at Boys' High. Lo and behold, it was the Kevan Gosper who had beaten Gordon Jones in the hundred. Despite his plea that his family had moved to Newcastle some months before, but that the Canterbury coach had boarded him privately so that he could represent Canterbury High, Harold Beard, who normally would not hurt a fly, began by giving him six of the best for having bankrupted SWASC. There were even stories that Harold sometimes grabbed hold of Gosper half-way through an important race to haul him back to school for another six, but this could be an exaggeration. What is true, however, is that Len and I also fell out of favour with the boss, because rumours began to emanate from P & C mothers' meetings that, politically, Len had leanings toward the left and that I was addicted to alcohol.

Another not-so-well-known performance was that, at an International athletics Carnival in Newcastle, the 15 years old Gosper outjumped the men with a leap of 21 feet 9.5 inches, which English and American sportswriters claimed to be a world record. I don't quite know what this has to do with my talk, but just as Margaret Whitlam had won a High Schools' Diving Championship, so did Kevan Gosper.

And then, luckily for his future, he broke his collar-bone at Australian Rules when it looked as if he might be heading for a career in Melbourne. Again, just as Phar Lap's successes caused the weight-for-age rules to be altered and the unbeatable Walter Lindrum the rules of billiards, Kevan's winning of 5 Senior State titles against very strong opposition caused the rules to be altered to a maximum of 3 events.

If I had to nominate Kevan's greatest performance in athletics I would choose his win as a rank outsider in the 400 metres in 1954 in Los Angeles when he beat the world record holder in a race listed as the "race of the century".

His best performance at N.B.H.S. was to win the prestigious Ross Mearns prize for manliness, leadership

and service to the school. It is noteworthy that he won a similar award, the Dean's prize, at the end of his stay at the Michigan State University.

His enthusiasm for the French language proved rather a handicap, however. Instead of learning the necessary examination vocabulary, Kevan knew the French for such exotic things as dog-faced baboon, whortleberry and so on, but which never appear in exam papers.

Without hurting his feelings, I should like to quote a couple of his mistranslations that have passed into folklore. The first, "Tant pis, tant mieux!" means roughly: "So much the worse, so much the better!" Recognising bits here and there, Kevan's translation was: "Having relieved herself, the aunt felt much better!" He did likewise with: "Rosa, émue, répondit . . ." ("Rosa, deeply agitated, answered . . ."), which Kevan transformed into: "The pink emu laid another egg . . ."

Because of his many trips to France and also the fact that in June of this year his son Brett in Paris married a French girl who knows no English, Kevan now speaks excellent French.

To sum up, if I had to choose one word only to describe Kevan Gosper, it would be "loyalty".

I now have the great pleasure of introducing our guest speaker to the four hundred other distinguished old boys waiting to welcome him.

Thank you.