



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

ADJOURNMENT

Leichhardt Electorate: Indigenous Rugby League

SPEECH

Thursday, 26 September 2002

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Page 7455
Questioner
Speaker Entsch, Warren, MP

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Mr ENTSCHE (Leichhardt—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources) (12.21 pm)—I would like to take this opportunity to bring to the House's attention the superb efforts of a small group of Cape York indigenous Australians in their endeavour to deal with the very real problem of alcohol abuse and domestic violence that we see all too often in our indigenous communities. I am sure you would be very well aware of it yourself, Mr Deputy Speaker Lindsay, with Palm Island being in your electorate. We have a very significant problem in Cape York. Governments put a hell of a lot of money into trying to deal with these issues. Unfortunately at times you have to tear your hair out in frustration because you do not seem to be able to make too many gains.

It is interesting to see how indigenous Australians are able to start to tackle some of these problems themselves, and tackle them I believe in a very effective way. I would like to recognise Cape York Rugby League's President, Rod Willie, who has put together the Cape York rugby league competition. This is its inaugural year. There are 19 sides from the four zones of Cape York. The communities of Hope Vale, Wujal Wujal, Cooktown, Pormpuraaw, Napranum, Coen, Old Mapoon, Aurukun, Lockhart River, Weipa, Bamaga, Umagica, Injinoo, New Mapoon and Seisia are all involved in the competition. Recently in Weipa they had the grand finals. The four zone winners, the Kowanyama Cyclones, the Hope Vale Cockatoos, the Old Mapoon Magpies and the Injinoo Crocs, played in the Weipa finals. At the end of the day there was a remarkable 18 tries, 10 to the Crocs. They of course won the competition. They were able to get there through the generous support of the Canberra based Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation. The whole event got nationwide coverage through the national indigenous network. Queensland Rugby League, Queensland sports and recreation, and Qantas also played a vital role.

What is unique about this is the fact that the team here consists of only three players over the age of 23. They were going to travel to Port Moresby in Papua New Guinea on their first international tour. It was supposed to be next year but with the enthusiasm that is clearly evident they said, 'Why don't we do it now?' They are up and ready to go. They will be taking on the yet to be decided premiers in the Port Moresby competition. There will be a curtain-raiser match between the Junior Kangaroos, an under-19 side, and the PNG President's XIII at Lloyd Robson Oval in Boroko near Port Moresby on 19 October.

Also, any breaches through the season that are alcohol related mean an automatic suspension for a month. All these young people are so keen to be out there playing their rugby, and it is alcohol free and it is domestic violence free. If there are any incidences of it by any of the players, they are automatically suspended. They compete really hard to be part of this team. We have a group of them going to Port Moresby, and I would like to recognise those who are going: Anthony Mara, Michael Peter, Patrick Ropeyarn, Horace Baira, Lawrence Pablo, Guyia Nona, Jeffrey Motton, Rex Burke, Edward Sailor, Jeffrey Tugai, Vincent Williams, Dwayne Bowen, Kusam Tamwoy, Morris Burke, Frank Billy, Jeffrey Pablo and Chris Jawai. They are going with their manager, Sireli Vola, and their coach, Roy Solomon. I congratulate Rod Willie and the team for a magnificent effort.

They are looking to attract funding for a full-time development officer to continue this program. I can assure you that this is a program that is really working. I for one will be up there belting on a few doors to make sure that we can get the appropriate resources to see this program spread. This is the sort of thing that I would like to see become quite infectious. It does work, and it is being run by Indigenous people for Indigenous people.