



Speech by

**PHIL REEVES**

**MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD**

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#### **ATHLETES WITH DISABILITIES**

**Mr REEVES** (Mansfield—ALP) (7.19 p.m.): I wish to inform the House of an article written by John MacDonald as his Monday Viewpoint in the Australian newspaper on 17 August. To say that I was flabbergasted to read such an article in the Australian would be an understatement. John MacDonald used the article to agree with the views of Arthur Tunstall in regard to sportspeople with disabilities. John MacDonald stated—

"... paraplegic athletes should be applauded but not at the expense of legitimate sport.

Things have gone way too far when you turn on the news for the Manikato-Premiere stakes replays, and you get Louise Sauvage and no races.

It isn't sport, it isn't entertaining and the demand for it is questionable."

He stated further on in the article—

"There is something distasteful about congratulating ourselves about disabled gold."

He also said—

"The camera can make the lame walk, the deaf hear and the blind see. Translated, this means 'we can feed them any muck we like and call it giving the public what they want. We can even call infotainment the news'.

Except paraplegic athletics hasn't a high news priority, certainly not in front of Dane Ripper.

TV makes objects of the camera feel good about themselves, however. It requires no investment of time and emotion, and no sacrifice."

This was the most disgusting article I have read by a so-called sports journalist. For a quality newspaper to allow this kind of journalism to be published is a blight on its editors. John MacDonald's assertion that sport for athletes with a disability is not legitimate sport is his first fallacy. What is sport? Is horse racing, the use of an underweighted person on top of a four-legged animal with whip in hand a sport? What about a person driving a computer-driven Formula 1 billion-dollar machine? Is that a sport? The Oxford Australian Dictionary states that sport is "amusement, diversion, fun". John MacDonald would do his readers justice if he actually knew the definition of sport.

John MacDonald is badly mistaken if he thinks the majority of the public cares about who won the Manikato stakes. While I am a keen follower of the horses, my keenness is there for the same reason as for 99% of the followers: I can punt on the result. I am under no illusion, unlike John MacDonald, that if people could not bet on the horses it would be lucky if there were more than the jockeys and their families there to watch. The trainers and owners would not even show; they would be at the casino having a punt. To use John MacDonald's own words, if horse racing and paralympics were put on an equal footing—no betting—I bet that the crowd and the interest would be in favour of the latter.

While I am on the subject of betting, I must compliment Centrebet, which considered the gold medals our athletes with a disability won at the last Commonwealth Games as part of the overall gold medal haul. Unlike John MacDonald, Centrebet considered the paralympics as genuine sport. My bank balance was appreciative of that gesture.

The entertainment value cannot truly be questioned. One only has to look at the support those athletes received. Unlike John MacDonald, people understand that the effort is on a par with, if not greater than, that of any able bodied sportsperson. Athletes with disabilities not only have to train long and hard for success; they also have to overcome the many barriers put in their way just to live in our society.

In his article John MacDonald talks about an equal footing. The sport he is complaining about not seeing on television, horse racing, is all about handicapping, age groups, and races for fillies and mares. Unlike the journalist—that might be too kind a term for him—I do not believe that showing a super athlete such as Louise Sauvage on television is muck. Not only is it inspirational; it is great to see a champion of any sport in action and Louise is no exception.

**Mr Sullivan:** Athletes with abilities.

**Mr REEVES:** That is exactly right. People such as John MacDonald have a narrow view of life and are yesterday's people. In common with Arthur Tunstall, he is from the dinosaur era and he should go home with Arthur and watch his home video films of Archer and Les Darcy.

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