



Speech by

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QUEENSLAND ACADEMY OF SPORT, NORTH QUEENSLAND

Mr REYNOLDS (Townsville—ALP) (7.09 p.m.): The Townsville-based Queensland Academy of Sport, north Queensland branch, performs a vital role in tapping into the rich pool of sporting talent in the vast region from Mackay to Cairns and out to Mount Isa. It also performs a vital role in servicing the athletes and coaches who live in these major centres outside Brisbane.

In focusing on the elite and emerging elite athletes in the north Queensland region, the academy offers an opportunity which would otherwise be denied to the majority of these very talented sportspeople, many of whom are capable of competing on a national basis.

The academy pilot program, established in March 1998, is entering the third year of its trial period, but I strongly believe that the sterling performances of the athletes it caters to and the coaching staff it supports have proved beyond doubt that the operation should be retained on a permanent basis.

Success stories from the region include: Townsville athlete Robert Hammond, who is vice-captain of the Australian youth squad; Chris Novak, also from Townsville, who is a contracted player in the NBL with the Townsville Crocodiles; netballer Deanna Turner from Mackay, who is the first All Australian junior from north Queensland; and Cairns athlete Ben Eales, who is a member of the Australian open breast stroke squad.

While these achievements are impressive, the quality of other young athletes coming up through the ranks promises many more. From these results it can be seen that in its short existence the northern academy has more than delivered national benchmark sporting services to the north Queensland region. The smooth operation is supported strongly by a team of dedicated coaches and by educational and scientific backup, all of which are effective in reaching the defined goal of bringing athletes to a standard whereby they can compete at a national or international level.

The northern academy focuses mainly on the sporting career and education of 15 to 20 year olds in the transition period between secondary school and tertiary level. In the process, the academy works closely with the parents of these potential champions in helping them establish their sporting careers.

While the Queensland Academy of Sport North Queensland manager Warwick Cann and his support team have worked hard in achieving high sporting standards, with the emphasis on elite athletes, the academy also focuses on providing sporting services and benchmarks for the wider community. Sports administrators and coaches from all sports and all sporting organisations share in the activities of the northern academy. Through this involvement, the academy team has highlighted and fostered an abundance of north Queensland sporting talent and, at the same time, provided regional athletes with access to the same standard of program available to their city or internationally based counterparts.

The northern academy covers six areas of sport: basketball, hockey, netball, soccer, women's softball and swimming. Overall, some 98 athletes from all over the northern region take part in the program, and the operation extends to a network of coaches, sports scientists and sports medicine providers from throughout the greater north Queensland region.

Quality training facilities are essential for peak performances, and while north Queensland is generally well equipped as far as these are concerned, Townsville's swimming and track venues do need urgent upgrading. Fortunately, the State Government has also recognised this dilemma and

contributed generously towards rectifying these problems. A recent \$77,262 grant to heat the 50-metre Long Tan Memorial Pool—this is essential for winter training—also covers the installation of overflow gutters and the construction of international standard competition blocks at the deep end.

Another much-needed and much-appreciated boost for Townsville and the northern academy has been a \$1m grant from the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Racing towards the redevelopment of the Townsville Sports Reserve. This will provide athletes with a much-needed new track, amenities, lighting and a sports oval. Redevelopment will also allow the reserve to operate as a national standard athletics facility for competitions and an international standard training venue.

During its short existence, the Queensland Academy of Sport North Queensland has provided numerous north Queensland athletes with the opportunity to develop their full sporting potential. In having access to state-of-the-art coaching, scientific and educational backup and equally important appropriate training facilities, each athlete has the opportunity to finetune those talents to become a national or international champion. For these reasons, I believe that it is vital to retain the Townsville-based academy for the benefit of north Queensland and to continue to build on the excellent results that the dedicated team has achieved in such a short time.

I commend the Beattie Labor Government for the work it has done in the last 18 months towards the academy. It has followed on with the work that the coalition Government did. It has been excellent for north Queensland, and I believe that the Queensland Academy of Sport North Queensland has much to offer north Queensland in the future decades.
