



Speech by

PHIL REEVES

MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD

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MR J. TAURIMA

Mr REEVES (Mansfield—ALP) (6.59 p.m.): After publicity in the last week, Jai Taurima has become a widely-known Australian athlete. I wish not to dwell on the controversy, only to say that the media has not been totally truthful in selectively quoting Jai's words. Today I want to inform the House of the real Jai. Jai Taurima has been selected to represent Australia in the men's long jump. This in itself should be a major achievement but, when one considers Jai's career, it shows the true character of this highly-skilled athlete.

Jai was selected in the Atlanta Olympics team. Prior to entering the Games Village, the so-called experts in Athletics Australia decided that he would have to reach the A standard again. If that was not bad enough, in their wisdom they sent Jai to the cold of Europe to prepare for the heat of Atlanta. He came within one centimetre of that qualifying A standard when he placed second in an event in Ireland. Jai caught the predictable cold in Europe and went to Atlanta a bit underdone. When he got to Atlanta, he tried to make up for lost time and pushed himself too far, which caused a slight hamstring strain.

The pressure of being selected for the Olympics and then being told he must qualify again was intense. Not to be perturbed, Jai went to great lengths to achieve the qualifying standard again. He missed the standard by a mere three centimetres at a wet athletics carnival in Atlanta a few days before the athletics competition was due to start. Therefore, due to officialdom, Australia missed out on having anyone represent it in the men's long jump at the Atlanta Olympics. More importantly, four years later, we do not have an Australian men's long jumper with Olympic experience at our own Sydney Olympics. It should also be said that Jai's jump at the Atlanta athletics meet would have qualified him for the final at the Olympics.

I was at the Brisbane Airport at about midnight when Jai arrived, shattered that his Olympic dream had been taken away from him. Jai could have quite easily spat the dummy, and I think many a lesser person would have done that. Instead, Jai took it all in his stride. If anything, it made him re-evaluate his career and become more committed to success. Jai made the hard decision to relocate away from his family and friends to Canberra to accept an AIS scholarship. Jai has been more focused on performance, without doubt having the Atlanta experience firmly in his mind. Jai gained a silver medal at the last Commonwealth Games by jumping the same distance as the winner but lost it on a count-back after injuring himself in his first jump.

In the recent world championships, Jai jumped out of his skin. Up against the world's best, Jai jumped his personal best on his last attempt and missed out by just one centimetre in gaining a bronze medal. All this heartbreak—being given an Olympic berth only to have it taken away, tying for a Commonwealth Games gold medal and losing it in a count-back, and being so close to gaining a medal at the worlds—would be enough to make a grown man cry. Instead of crying over spilt milk, Jai has used it as a motivation to get into the Sydney Olympic team and perform better than ever.

Jai will have a special person looking over him—his mother, who unfortunately has not been alive to witness his triumphs and disappointments over the past few years. I am sure that when Jai needs that special help in Sydney on Monday, 25 September and Thursday, 28 September she will be doing her bit for him. I also want to pay tribute to Jai's dad and all his family and friends, particularly his

brothers, Stacey and Corey, who have been there to give him the encouragement, love and support to make it to the Olympics.

Mr Roberts: It was a great performance last Sunday at Nudgee College as well.

Mr REEVES: As the member for Nudgee says, it was a great performance last Sunday. All athletes such as Jai would not achieve without the sacrifices of and support from their families. An athlete's achievement is their family's as well, and they should all be very proud of it. This is Jai's moment. He firmly believes that with 110,000 Australians cheering him on he will achieve greatness—if he has not already. I am proud and honoured that I know Jai. He is an athlete with a difference. He likes to have a smoke, loves pizzas, beer and staying up late conquering his Playstation and rides a motorcycle, but that matches his personality.

I wish Jai all the best in Sydney. I am sure he will achieve his best, but above all else he will enjoy the experience. We are all very proud of his achievements. I know everyone in this Chamber supports my words on Jai and all the other Australian athletes taking part in the Sydney Olympics.
