



Speech by

**PHIL REEVES**

**MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD**

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Hansard 15 November 2000

### **PARALYMPIC GAMES**

**Mr REEVES** (Mansfield—ALP) (11.24 p.m.): Four weeks ago today the world witnessed the opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games. From that moment on, Australia and the world witnessed nothing but success after Australian success. The organisation of the Games was a credit to the Sydney Paralympic Organising Committee, which should be congratulated on its preparation and planning for the event. The Australian Paralympic Committee should also be congratulated on the manner in which it prepared the team. The success of the Games has placed paralympic sport on the map in Australia and enabled people from all walks of life to understand the significance of sport for individuals with a disability.

Throughout the Games it was evident that children were enthralled by the sporting experiences which they witnessed, and many thousands of these were from Queensland schools who travelled to Sydney for the Games. Indeed, it could be argued that the Sydney Paralympic Games was a national success and has achieved an education for young children which would have been deemed impossible some three years ago. A generation of children have been educated to understand individuals with a disability and have learnt how to better understand this section of our community. One child was heard to say to a Paralympic athlete in a wheelchair, "What sport do you play? Can I have your autograph?", whereas earlier in the week the same child was scathing of individuals in wheelchairs. This education process is very important. Another was overheard asking his mother whether he could have a wheelchair for Christmas. How times have changed. Wheelchairs have suddenly become cool.

Unbeknown to most, there was a strong Queensland contingent in the team—consisting of 46 athletes, 32 male and 13 female, and some 30 administration, medical and athlete service staff, all of whom gave their time freely receiving no tangible rewards. Therefore, the total number from Queensland on team 2000 was 76 out of a possible 438. Overall, Queensland athletes brought home 25 medals—seven gold, eight silver and 10 bronze, which is a credit to Queensland. The overall medal count was 149 medals of which 63 were gold. Of interest is the fact that the Chief de Mission, Paul Bird, and Assistant Chief de Mission, Dr Keith Gilbert, and Dr Brendan Burkett, the flag bearer for the opening ceremony, were all proud Queenslanders.

The future of these Games and athletes should be of prime interest to the Queensland Parliament, perhaps one we could assist with by directing resources to assist future developments at the ground level. Also, the Federal Parliament has set up a committee entitled Parliamentarians for the Paralympics organised and chaired by Graham Edwards, the Labor MP for Cowan. This committee is bipartisan in nature. I take this opportunity to extend an invitation to members of this House to join with me in a similar enterprise in the future. I congratulate the Paralympics for a magnificent games. I conclude by saying that the Paralympics was all about changing the focus—not what a person with a disability cannot do but what a person with a disability can do.

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