

**20th Anniversary Dinner**  
**Chairman's Speech – Brian Weir**

**Saturday 3 December 2005**

I'm honored and proud to stand here as the academy chairman to celebrate our 20 years of achievement –initially as the Illawarra institute of sport and then as the Illawarra academy of sport.

It's great to see all our past chairmen here tonight – Tom, Ted and Graham, And all our past administrative directors – Ted, George, Gareth and Cheryl and of course our current director Mark who has coordinated this celebration tonight.

I'd like to acknowledge and pay tribute to everybody present. All of you are here this evening, due to either your own contribution, or that of your predecessors, or on behalf of the organizations and sporting groups you represent.

I'd like to especially pay tribute to the hundreds of volunteers who have willingly given their time, their skill, and their energy to coach, manage or to assist with our programs over these 20 years.

To the past and present board members, I offer a particular thank you for your contribution. Being a board member carries a special governance responsibility which you have willingly undertaken. Ours is a very large board and most of the time we undertake a policy monitoring and surveillance role but occasionally every 2 or 3 meetings, a thorny issue comes before us and then the depth, the diversity and the passion of the board comes to the fore.

There are two board members who have served with me since 1988 when the IAS was incorporated and they are John O Dwyer and Gordon Lewis.

John is quite literally a legend in sporting circles, as well as being a former mayor of Shellharbour council. Tonight John is out of the area on Cricket duties and very much regrets that he is unable to take part in these celebrations.

Gordon has also been a long serving member of the Wingecarribee Council and is its current mayor. I would like to particularly acknowledge the contribution of both these gentlemen who are the only remaining community representatives from the original group who commenced on the board in 1988. The others were Graham Hamilton, Ted Tobin, Gary Langton, Val Loomes and Robert Sim.

There are three other long term partners, whose support and endorsement, we greatly appreciate and who have been represented on our board all this time. They are the Australian Institute of Sport, The South Coast Branch of the Sports Medicine Federation and the NSW Department of School Education, which also provide us with our current home base at Fairy Meadow primary school.

My speech tonight is entitled “Strength in partnerships”. It is a very apt title because we are here tonight solely due to the strength of our partnerships over the past 20 years. The first of those partnerships I’d like to acknowledge, and our most enduring one, is that with the University of Wollongong stretching from Ken McKinnon and Peter Rousch though to Gerard Sutton, John Patterson and the university representative on our board Greg Rowland. The university was our first partner, our first home base and where the idea first started.

Next is our partnership with our major sponsor the NSW department of Sport, Recreation and Tourism commencing with Michael Cleary in the mid 80’s through to Sandra Nori today and including for a time, the now premier Morris Iemma – when he was Minister for Sport. At the local office that support has been total from the original role of Ian Richardson, which we’ll hear more about later, through Lindy Mathews and today with Keith Wallace our vice president. At the Departments head office we have always received great support and counsel from staff such as Neville Goldspring and Mia Jenkins who is here tonight.

I found in my files the media release issued by Michael Cleary, the Minister for Sport, in January 1987, I’d like to read it for you.

Some years ago the NSW government paid us the ultimate compliment by making regional academies mandatory across NSW.

Next I must pay tribute to our partnership with local government especially the 5 mayors whose support was so vital and so readily forth coming in the mid 80’s represented tonight by their successors Alex Darling, David Hamilton, Sandra McCarthy, Greg Watson (represented by John Anderson) and Gordon Lewis. The five councils are major sponsors, not just financially but also through the use of their facilities. I well remember how Tom, Ted and Ian approached us back then and assured us that our contributions would be spent on the athletes not on bricks and mortar.

Next I’d like to mention the sports and their respective associations. The first five sports whose associations took the leap of faith with the hand over their best young athletes to us in 1986 were basketball, hockey, gymnastics, netball and cricket. 20 Years on we still have a very strong partnership with hockey, netball and cricket associations throughout the region as these 3 programs continue very successfully. I’d like to acknowledge Val Curran who is a legend in netball and who is here tonight and thank you Val for our netball partnership for 20 years. Also present tonight who is a great lady and dear friend who was our first netball coach and who has kept an eye on us for 20 years and who will speak to you later – Margaret Corbett.

Currently we have 11 sporting programs and a very strong relationship not just with these sporting associations but with the parents and families of our athletes. The parents have always given great support and commitment to the academy, so as to assist their sons and daughters.

Our strong lengthy partnerships with sporting associations extends right through to their state associations.

Sponsors too have been a vital partnership, I've already mentioned our major sponsor the NSW dpt of SR&T, the five councils and the university of Wollongong.

Now I would like to acknowledge our first corporate sponsor – city coast credit union our hockey program sponsor. City coast commenced its partnership with us in Feb 1987, sponsoring our basketball program and this partnership has continued. Later we signed up BHP, now known as BlueScope Steel as our cricket sponsor, firstly for the boys program and later the girls program and in recent years our individual athlete program.

I must also acknowledge our lengthy partnership with our auditor Murray Reid and our uniform supplier ACEIT sports wear.

And Mike Archer from BlueScope, Barry Wood from City Coast, Murry Reid and Gino Arcello from ACEIT are all present tonight.

Over the years there have been numerous sponsors and financial supporters both long and short term and whose contribution, big or small, has been invaluable to the success to the academy.

Next the coaches. I've mentioned Margaret but there are two other coaches who have served for many years in those initial programs, one was Bruce Jones in cricket, and Garry Wilshire in hockey. We have had many long serving and dedicated coaches over the years and Garry's wife Rae served for many years as our very conscientious program manager.

Academy teams don't win grand finals – our coaches aren't in the limelight, they are coaching development squads, so the coaches are really our unsung heroes. They spot talent and potential, they polish it and nurture it and when that talent blossoms and is recognised at a higher level, they gain the satisfaction, if not the recognition, for their hard work, usually many years later.

Finally I'd like to acknowledge our strong relationship with the media of the region. The most enduring example of that is with the Illawarra Mercury and my good friend ( and I haven't got many good friends in the media, in my line of work) - Mike Gandon.

All media outlets throughout the region have gone way beyond what they were obliged to do to promote the academy and especially our athletes.

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The question needs to be asked – why? Why have we had such strong, enduring and successful partnerships with so many people and organizations for so long?

I believe it is because the academy is different – it is special – and everyone associated with it recognizes that special quality.

When the NSW corporate affairs commission accepted our Rules and Objects on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1988, we were granted the status of being a 'sports association'. But we are much more than that. There is a spirit and a special quality which sets the academy apart. I'm sure our partners see, as we see, and are captured, as we are, by our youth and the opportunity the academy gives our youth.

There is something very magical and exciting in seeing these kids turn up to a selection trial with their innocence, ambition, bravado, gawkiness and varying levels of maturity. Then they present themselves at the induction, take part in their squad photographs, get fitted with their new academy tracksuits and suddenly they seem a bit taller, a bit straighter, a bit more confident and they suddenly realize they have the sporting world at their feet.

We are proud to be giving a unique sporting opportunity to these Illawarra youth who have far more potential than many of them realize. By the time they graduate from the academy their potential as elite athletes and excellent young citizens has been awakened and they leave our nest better skilled and more confident and to soar, hopefully to great heights.

The spirit in the academy today reflects the ethos, the standards, and the vision engendered by the successive boards and academy staff and coaches – coupled with the success of our athletes on the international, national, and local playing fields.

For us, at the academy to have achieved this for 20 year is solely due to our partnerships and I, as the current chairman, and on behalf of the board, sincerely thank everyone who has contributed to the academy's success during these first and very exciting 20 years.

Thank you.

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