

Melbourne University Young Achiever Award

Speaking notes – John Dewar

Date: Wednesday 16 February 2011

Venue: University House, The University of Melbourne

Time: 5.30pm - 8.00pm

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests and rugby fans all, I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Wurrundjeri People of the Kulin Nations, the traditional owners of the land on which this launch takes place.

I'm delighted to be here, on the eve of new Victorian Rugby Union and Super Rugby seasons, to announce the University of Melbourne Young Achiever Award for school-aged reps across the State. This award to the value of \$5000 will be presented annually by the University and the VRU to a player from the Victorian School's Rugby Union, a player who exemplifies the characteristics of Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop of leadership, academic endeavour and sporting excellence.

It is no secret that the University values all three of these attributes highly.

We collectively strive to attract the best and brightest to our campus, be it through innovative course offerings or support scholarships, and we are widely seen as a leader in the higher education sector.

Athletically it is no different, with more than 4000 members across nearly 40 different sporting clubs, competing in community, regional and international competitions. We handed out 109 Blues awards to our sporting high achievers last year, a year in which we won the Indigenous University Games, and won national Uni championships in cycling, men's basketball and women's netball.

We're an Elite Athlete Friendly University as recognised by the Australian Government, and we support more than one hundred elite student athletes, many of whom have gone on to represent Australia at an international senior level, from sports as diverse as rowing to competitive walking. It's a status we're justly proud of, and one we recognised again only recently in becoming the Melbourne Rebels foundation Preferred Education Partner for the 2011 Super Rugby season. Ross, we look forward to seeing your clubs debut season kick off this Friday, I am sure you will do this city proud.

It is clear that the University has had a long tradition of both playing and supporting elite level sport in this country. While many may view the city of Melbourne as an AFL heartland, with both League and Union dominating the headlines further north, it has not always been the case. Since the foundation of the Victorian Rugby Union in 1909, of which the University was a foundation member, rugby has been a mainstay on campus, from its first premiership in 1910 through to nine consecutive grand final appearances from 1959 to 1967.

Along the way it's provided a host of players for both Victorian and National representative sides; names like Gordon Sturtridge, Geoffrey Vaughn, John Cocks, Peter Hone and yes, Weary Dunlop, are familiar to many in the room.

In celebrating the Club's Centenary in 2009 in this very building, we heard even more stories of University involvement in elite level rugby; from the 'halcyon' days of the 50s and 60s where (by Peter Gillies estimation) the University had no less than 14 representatives in the state squad, to the 1957-58 British Isles Wallaby tour featuring Vaughn as the University's only representative in a national team featuring seven players from Australian Universities. And of course, there's been one hundred years of intervarsity stoushes with the University of Sydney.

Sir Weary is a fitting benchmark for aspiring Union representatives. While his bravery on the battlefields of World War Two are widely recognised, he was no less fearless when taking to the park for the University, Victoria or Australia.

An alumnus of the University, as a graduate in pharmacy and medicine, he started out in the fourths of Melbourne University Rugby Football Club in 1931, rising rapidly through the ranks to win caps for first Victoria, and then the Wallabies just a year later in 1932. The first Victorian-born Australian representative, Sir Weary remains the only player from this state inducted into the Wallaby Hall of Fame. For many here, I am sure there is a nice synergy

between the association of the man who gave so much during 'the War to End All Wars', and the Victorian School's competition, itself founded on the eve of war.

A rugby-focussed University award is not a new idea and indeed two years ago the Centenary served as the launching pad for the Melbourne University Rugby Foundation, designed to help keen University reps expand their educational and career development. But the Young Achiever Award will be different. Not only will it be forever linked with one of our most famous Australians and presented at the Rebels end of season luncheon that bears his name, but it will be focussed at a schools level, giving students an opportunity to complete a world class education and sample exactly what elite level rugby is all about.

I'd like to thank Victorian Rugby Union President Tim North, Melbourne Rebels Chairman Harold Mitchell, Chief Executive Officer Ross Oakley, Victorian Schools Rugby Union Patron Robert Dalziel, Melbourne University Rugby Football Club President Simon Davis and all at the club for helping to bring this opportunity to life.

May 2011 continue to be a historic year in Melbourne's rugby history. Thank you.