

Media Release

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Queensland politicians queue up to attend Indigenous sports carnival in Brisbane over Ashes weekend

It's the Ashes Test match in Brisbane this weekend and there's a long line of politicians in town queuing up to witness an historic sports event played out, but they're not heading to the Gabba.

They're all off to the little known Whites Hill Reserve in the Brisbane suburb of Camp Hill to see the first national Indigenous touch football side ever selected - take on the current world champions, the Australian national touch team.

Politicians attending major sports events is hardly new, but when they turnout to an Indigenous sports and culture event in the same town on the same weekend as the opening test of an Ashes series, it's quite an achievement.

First Contact Chairman and prominent Indigenous community leader, Robbie Williams, says a record field of federal, state and local government politicians have agreed to help with presentations and formalities.

Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister, Mal Brough, has offered to warm up with the national Indigenous side and address the team before the big game.

While the organisers hope that new State Labor MP and former Channel Nine sports newsreader Chris Bombalis will help NRL legend Artie Beetson call the main game.

Robbie Williams says all the politicians will be needed as well as very welcome - to help with the presentations of national jerseys to the Indigenous side, team officials and with more than 60 trophies for the triple headline events.

In another first for the carnival, an Indigenous international will be staged for the first time when the New Zealand Maori side takes on Papua New Guinea in the lead up to the main clash.

Completing the triple-header on the Saturday evening is the "Battle of the States" between Queensland and "traditional" rivals NSW.

Also on hand from the political fraternity, will be new Queensland Sports Minister, Andrew Fraser.

Robbie Williams said it was a "huge kudos" for the Indigenous community for a State Sports Minister to attend the event for the first time.

Mr Fraser will be joined by State colleague, Community Services Minister Warren Pitt, whose portfolio now includes Indigenous Affairs, as well as Federal Indigenous Affairs Minister Brough.

While Police Minister and former Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy Minister, Judy Spence, who is also the local State MP, has been at or supported the event every year since it began in 1993, Mr Williams said.

Other first timers include the new Liberal Federal MP for Bonner, Ross Vasta, whose seat was named after Australia's first Aboriginal member of the Federal Parliament, the late Neville Bonner.

Other State MPs there will be Gary Fenlon and Phil Reeves along with Brisbane City councillors, Kerry Rae, Catherine Birmingham and Adrian Schrunner.

For the small Murri organisation in Mt Gravatt, the First Contact Aboriginal Corporation, who have staged the event every year for 13 years, its "hard earned" recognition.

Robbie Williams and his wife Trish have seen the community festival grow to become widely recognised as one of the biggest and most successful fully Indigenous run sporting and cultural events in Australia.

For the last four years the \$250, 000 event has attracted 10,000 spectators over the two days.

This year, a record 2000 players and officials from 117 Indigenous teams from Queensland, the NT, New South Wales and Victoria will battle it out for \$30,000 in prizes - and bragging rights as the best in the world of Indigenous touch.

"It's an historic occasion for the players to represent Indigenous people for the first time at the national level in this sport - against the best team in the world," says Robbie Williams.

The players will also have the honour of receiving their jerseys from NRL legend Artie Beetson.

Before running out against the world's best team, they will hear the national anthem sung by Indigenous country legend Vic Simms and local young talent Adam James.

"That's something hardly any Indigenous people will have experienced before.

"Hearing the national anthem sung by Indigenous artists, before actually playing in a major national and international Indigenous run event to represent their people nationally, all in front of thousands of people, for the first time ever," he said.

But Mr Williams said it was also an opportunity for Indigenous people and their organisations to show the top levels of government that Indigenous organisations and the Indigenous people who run them - are competent, capable and deserve to continue.

"It's recognition we have moved successfully to mounting national and international level competition for this sport, for our people.

"Importantly, it comes at a time when many Indigenous organisations are under tremendous political pressure of being closed down.

"The message Australians are getting from governments, their departments and from elements in the media is our organisations are not wanted by governments.

But the Indigenous community's Indigenous Sports and Cultural Festival was a proven 10-year-plus case study in success by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in setting up, managing, marketing and running large scale events, Mr Williams said.

“The fact that we have so many politicians here is very important recognition for Indigenous Australians, of that.

“We also have 10,000 people turning up each year, both Indigenous and non Indigenous, for the last four years.

“This carnival is an initiative from our community.

“It has given a multi million dollar – and growing - economic boost to the wider local economy, for more than a decade now.

“The economic impact has more than tripled since the carnival’s inception.

“So has the reputation for the high standard competition in both Indigenous and mainstream touch football circles.

“A record, which next year, we hope to secure a major sponsorship deal with an Australian based multi-national company, and formal accreditation of the carnival with the Australian Touch Association.

“This will be an important step toward securing the future for this sport - and the opportunities this carnival has established - for the Indigenous community.

“Not just here in Brisbane but all around the country.

“We believe we can go on to guarantee a strong flow of international class Indigenous players who can press for places in the Australian national touch teams, for years to come.

“That’s a very positive story to tell to governments and to all Australians,” he said.

The Indigenous Sports and Cultural Festival is free to the public, alcohol free and provides free supervised rides for children, with non-indigenous people warmly welcome, on Saturday and Sunday.

For information on the sports and the extensive cultural program see First Contact’s website: www.firstcontact.asn.au

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