

Underlined loud and clear here this evening is how important sport can be in our lives.

We love sport because of how it forces life to move on: there's always a new match, a new season; there's always a dream that things can get better. And we love it too because of how it can stop time, and make us become utterly lost in the moment.

We love sport because it reminds us how the barely believable can still sometimes happen, especially if you prepare enough and dare enough.

We love how it's always relative - to the next challenge, the next level of expertise and competition calibre; and how it unfailingly proves that what you get out of life is directly connected to what you put into it.

We love that, in the dust of defeat as well as in the joyous flush of victory, there is always a glory to be found if you have done your best.

And we love how it repeatedly proves that it's never over 'til it's over.

Ladies and gentlemen. It's my privilege to acknowledge and thank you all on behalf of the Wairarapa Secondary principals' Association –

- Sport Wellington Wairarapa, and Dayle: for your background and foreground support throughout the year, and for this crowning tribute evening
- Thank you to our guest speaker Eden Cruise for sharing with us your insights into the emotional and physical demands and the difficult but inspiring nature of higher level competition
- Sports coordinators: thank you for your liaising and enabling, for dealing to the detail and for navigating the long haul of the seasons

- Coaches and teachers: for walking the tightrope of expectations from every quarter; for all the strategising and mobilising and optimising, and for your crucial role in helping develop improved and more fulfilled young people
- Referees and umpires: thank you for putting yourselves on the line and accepting the inescapable scrutiny that comes with this choice of role
- Parents, caregivers and whanau: for all the ferrying to and fro, the being there and the bearing witness; for fully appreciating how every game becomes important when you know and love the players.
- And young people: firstly, our student hosts –your fluent presenting and transitioning has been admirable, and the opening karanga beautifully done. And finally, the young sportswomen and men whose determination and commitment and achievement has been celebrated here this evening. Congratulations for getting to where you are now; for enduring the sweat & bruises & injuries, and for being ready to face the constant questions asked by training and match-day performance – for making yourself vulnerable to the defining judgments of those looking on; tonight is primarily about winners, but all of you will have tasted the grim twist of failure, and know the lonely task of pulling yourself back round. Well done for continuing to face up to the most difficult competition of all – yourself. It's a challenge that will last a lifetime, but your readiness to take it on as intently as you are now will stand you in very good stead for all that lies ahead. Best wishes for your journey.