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**Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development and Statistics, Public Service, Peoples Charter for Change and Progress, Information, iTaukei Affairs, Sugar Industry and Lands and Mineral Resources**

**SPEECH AT THE OPENING OF THE ANZ STADIUM**

**ANZ Stadium Tuesday, June 11th, 2013
SUVA 1700 Hours**

The Chairman, Board Members and Management

and Staff of the Fiji Sports Council;

Management and Staff of the ANZ Bank;

Distinguished Guests;

My fellow Fijians.

Bula vinaka and a very good evening to you all.

Welcome to Fiji’s new truly world-class sporting facility - the ANZ National Stadium. It’s been a long time coming but finally it’s here. And it’s my privilege to fire the starting pistol on a whole new era of Fijian sporting history and achievement.

As a nation, we’ve had many reasons to be proud in recent months. There was the way we came together to quickly rebuild our country after Hurricane Evan. There was the way we welcomed our first brand new wide-bodied planes bearing the new masi design of Fiji Airways. There was the way ordinary Fijians came in their thousands to national consultations on a new constitution, in the lead up to parliamentary elections next year. And tonight we celebrate the opening of a new venue in our capital city fit for the sporting heroes who represent our country and make every Fijian proud.

We also remember those sporting men and women who came before, who succeeded in spite of their poor facilities. Those who had no proper footwear, no proper track on which to run, none of the modern equipment and facilities that modern athletes have come to expect. And yet they overcame these obstacles and still did us proud. I believe that they are with us here in spirit tonight as we open this amazing new Stadium.

This, of course, is the ANZ Stadium’s official opening. But I’m delighted to acknowledge that our young people well and truly jumped the gun when they gathered here for the Coca Cola Games last month. As we watched in person or on television, we quickly realised that we didn’t need to cut a ribbon or unveil a plaque to understand why this place is so important. It was written all over the faces of those kids.

The thousands of school children who competed in those Games provided the best opening we could have ever had. It was fun, it was exhilarating and it was inspiring. It was truly what this place should be – a celebration of competition, of individual effort, of teamwork, and of good sportsmanship.

Many of those school children will be back in this Stadium in the years ahead representing Fiji in international competition. So I personally can’t think of a better way to have broken it in. Certainly, seeing students from around Fiji converging here in this brand-new facility to compete in a range of track and field events captured the imagination of the whole nation.

In this place, we will see triumphs and disappointments, hopes dashed and dreams fulfilled. We will see the best of Fiji’s athletes and sports people competing against the region’s best and the world’s best. Because with these state-of-the-art facilities, we believe that we will attract the best, creating many new opportunities for sports tourism. This is good news for sports lovers in Fiji and around the region, who will be treated to many more international matches and tournaments in the coming years.

In fact, tomorrow night I hope to see many of you back here to cheer on the Flying Fijians as they square off against the Classic All Blacks.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nothing is more important to my Government than the fitness and well-being of our people. Which is why we are building new integrated sporting centres throughout the country, providing people in rural and maritime communities with some of the facilities our towns and cities have come to expect. Of course, this is the pinnacle of that effort - the venue where the best performers will eventually come to represent their districts and, in many cases, their country. Striving to be the region’s best and the world’s best.

In fact, it's already happened. Four athletes who competed in the Coke Games have qualified for the IAAF World Youth Championships in Ukraine. This is a remarkable achievement, and on behalf of the Nation: congratulations and good luck!

To everyone who has contributed to this magnificent project, I want to pay tribute and convey the Nation’s thanks. I especially want to extend my appreciation to the Board and Management of the Fiji Sports Council, the ANZ Bank and relevant Government Departments for their drive and effort.

 I now have the greatest pleasure in declaring the new ANZ Stadium open.

 Vinaka vakalevu. Thank you.

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