

Gavirate becomes a part of Australia

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There were representatives of the local police force, the civil defence, the provincial police force, and the carabinieri present. There were also nautical craft of the Italian Red Cross, of the police and of the civil defence. Parking, access to the cycle lane, and even entry onto the provincial road to Varese were forbidden.

On the morning of **Thursday, 3rd March**, there was heavy security along the lakeside, in Gavirate, for the inauguration of the building that will accommodate the **Australians**. The “L-shaped” building, which was built, after intense discussion, to house the sports representatives from Australia, was officially handed over to the Canberra sports authorities, who will use it for the next twenty years.

A group of politicians, sports and institutional authorities and athletes attended the ceremony, **which was intentionally held in English**, to emphasise the fact that this little piece of Varese Province belongs to Australia.

The event was presided over by **John Coates**, the Chairman of the Australian Olympic Committee, **Mark Arbib**, the Australian Sports Minister, and **Warwick Forbes**, the General Manager of the **Australian Institute of Sport**, who, for three years, has closely followed the

construction of the sports centre in a foreign country, the first international experience of this kind. Among the important guests, there were the **President of the Province, Dario Galli**, and the MP, **Marco Reguzzoni**, who started the project off six years ago. There were also the Mayor of Gavirate, **Felice Paronelli**, with other members of the local town council, as well as the Prefect, **Simonetta Vaccari**, and the regional counsellors, **Giangiaco Longoni and Renzo Bossi**. Among the local sportspeople, there were **Dino Meneghin, Cecco Vescovi, Noemi Cantele, Elia Luini and Fabrizio Macchi**.

At 11 am, Dario Galli and Mark Arbib officially unveiled the plaque that entrusts Australia with the building that will welcome athletes involved in European competitions.

The first arrival is expected in two weeks' time, when the delegation of **table tennis players** will arrive; later a **four-team tournament**, in the middle of April, will bring **wheelchair basketball teams** from Italy, Australia, South Africa and France. Then, it will be the turn of athletes of women's sailing, Australian football, canoeing, cycling and para-cycling.

During the official speeches, mention was made of the long-standing friendship that unites the International Olympic Committees of the countries, which began in 1956, with Cortina, in the winter, and Melbourne, in the summer.

The Italian National Olympic Committee representative, **Giovanni Petrucci**, invited the province not to undervalue the enormous potential of this presence, which will also allow local athletes pit themselves against opponents of great sporting calibre. The region clearly accepted this invitation some time ago, given that many sporting associations have attended and used the accommodation facilities and sports centres near Gavirate and Castronno for many years.

Among those present, there was also the correspondent of an Australian news agency, who was there to report on a situation that the Australian people still know little about, but that will become increasingly known to sportspeople. "Our thanks go to the government in Canberra, for supporting and sponsoring the best training for our athletes, also with an eye to London in 2012" said **John Coates**.

The sports centre, which has twenty-five rooms, gyms, changing rooms, a rehabilitation centre with swimming pools and physiotherapy rooms, is now ready to welcome its Australian guests; there is a prospect of opening up also to the sporting, medical and scientific fields. Although, it is not yet known when and on what basis.

Redazione VareseNews
redazione@varesenews.it

