

New Icehouse a big hit

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Slippery start for Olympic rink

John Brumby slips on the ice as the Olympic Winter Institute of Australia opens at Docklands.

Australian ice sports have received a huge boost on the eve of the Winter Olympics with the opening of the Icehouse complex at Docklands.

At the launch of the gleaming new \$58 million, two-rink centre, the largest of its kind in the southern hemisphere, Minister for Sport, Recreation and Youth Affairs James Merlino said the Icehouse would provide a "quantum shift" for winter sports in Australia.

The centre, officially opened today by Premier John Brumby, features a specialised winter sports training gym and medical facilities and is the new home of the Olympic Winter Institute of Australia.



Figure skaters Katherine Firkin and Henri Dupont at the official opening of Icehouse, the new ice skating rink at Docklands.

Photo: Paul Rovere

Mr Brumby hailed the opening of the centre as a "sensational day for our city, for our state", and a crucial aspect of his determination to make Melbourne the "best sports city in the world".

The opening featured live exhibitions of curling, figure skating, speed skating and ice hockey, accompanied by big screen imagery and a voiceover fully utilising a \$1 million audiovisual system.

When fireworks cascaded from the ceiling at the completion of the opening ceremony, hundreds of young skaters took to the ice, indicating the importance of public use of the complex. It will be open to recreational skaters from 6am, 364 days a year, providing the first permanent rink near the CBD since the demise of St Kilda's St Moritz in the 1980s.

Ice sports have long relied on a single rink at suburban Oakleigh, following the demise of other rinks at Ringwood, Dandenong and Footscray.

The Icehouse will be of particular importance to ice hockey in Victoria, which has been unable to capitalise on periods of popularity, including a stint on ABC television in the 1980s.

Glenn Grandy, President of the Blackhawks Ice Hockey Club, said that the Icehouse would bring players back to the sport, and capture a new generation of adherents for the sport.

“Hopefully it will just mean a further development to all the players, kids coming into the sport... to bring everything up to the standard we’ve wanted it to for the last twenty or thirty years.”

Mr Grandy is hoping the centre will mean participation in his sport by young people will "go through the roof".

Icehouse general manager Darren Walls, after dutifully listing the names of the dignitaries present, exclaimed "we're here and how exciting is it!" to loud applause from the large crowd of ice sport enthusiasts.

Mr Walls compared the likelihood of the centre being built to "recruiting Jamaicans to a bobsled team".

He praised the contribution of Rino Grollo to the fruition of the project, saying the building icon had said "just do it" when the idea was pitched to him.