

Museum a tribute to sports greats

19 galleries highlight the achievements of legends

THE STAR 25/05/08 M/S 24



TALE OF
TWO CITIES
NEW YORK
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THE question was catchy. "When you count the loves of your life, is sports first or second?"

That was part of an advertisement to announce the opening of the Sports Museum of America in New York City on May 7.

As the first all-sports museum in the United States, it has collaborated with 50 Halls of Fame, national governing bodies and sports organisations to pay tribute to sports great and their triumphs.

In short, it is a toast to all types of sports that Americans love.

"This museum will be a place where people go to dream about the glories of the past and to create the future," said former ice hockey player Jim Craig.

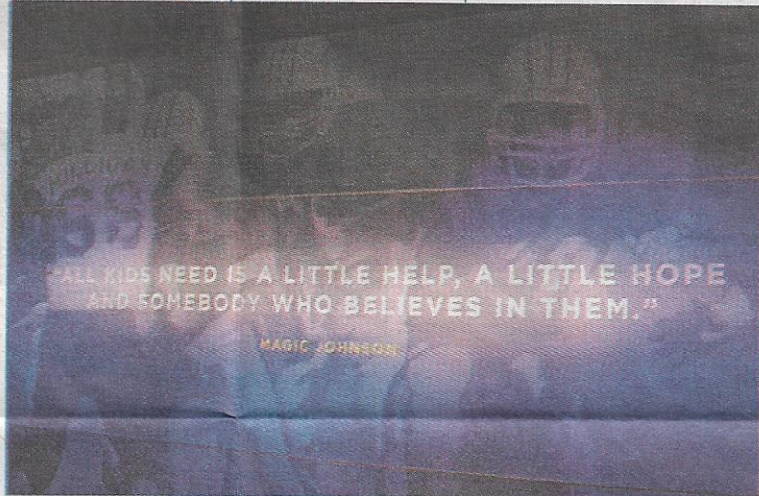
It was a sunny spring day when the museum held an outdoor ceremony in Lower Manhattan to mark the occasion. At least 30 big names in American sports turned up and it was quite a sight to see Martina Navratilova seated next to Carl Lewis on stage.

Billie Jean King was there; so were former athlete Bruce Jenner and tennis player Patrick McEnroe.

But the crowd reserved their loudest screams for Eli Manning, the quarterback hero of Super Bowl champion New York Giants.

"It's a great honour to be here with so many great sports figures of our time. New York is a town that loves all sports, a town of great energy," Manning told the wild, cheering spectators.

Even New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg said he was overwhelmed to be surrounded by such a big number of sports legends.



Inspiring: Words of wisdom from Magic Johnson on display at the Sports Museum.

"There is a transcending power about sports. It inspires us, teaches us about teamwork and respect," he said.

New York, he said, was such an incredible sports town that it was fitting that Big Apple was home to the nation's first museum dedicated to sports.

Bloomberg was also delighted about the location of the museum. It is in the heart of Lower Manhattan, near Wall Street and the Sept 11 memorial site.

"The redevelopment of Lower Manhattan, after 9/11, has proved the doubters wrong. It has now become a vibrant part of the city. Now the streets are teeming, businesses are coming back and families are flooding in," he said.

According to a statement, the museum has a collection of 600 artefacts and 1,100 photographs featured in 19 galleries that highlight sports such as baseball, American football, basketball and figure skating.

These artefacts include a souvenir boxing glove that had been autographed by Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier from their 1974 battle in Madison Square Garden in New York City.

There is also Jesse Owens' diary, besides

Billie Jean King's fourth-grade report card where a teacher wrote about her "athletic prowess".

Incidentally, the museum is also home to the Billie Jean King International Women's Sports Centre, which has been described as "the first and only hall of fame dedicated to athletes and pioneers in women's sports."

One section highlighted "Olympics: When the World Comes Together" where visitors could check out the triumphs of swimmer Michael Phelps who won eight medals at the 2004 Olympics when he was just 19 years old.

There is also a feature on Jackie Joyner-Kersey, described as the first lady of sport and named after Jackie Kennedy because her grandmother felt that someday, she would be "the first lady of something."

Don't leave home without a keepsake if you have the cash. A retail store measuring 4,000 sq ft offers sports fans all the merchandise and memorabilia that they can afford.

The museum is open daily. Ticket prices range from US\$20 to US\$27, depending on the age bracket. Children under four years old are allowed free entrance. For more details, visit www.sportsmuseum.com