

Oaks De Zeeuw – Prefect (Crowther House Captain)

Keynote Speech 2026

Good morning Mr Featherston, Mr Angus, Dr Swann, Ms Clark, teachers, students and my family.

Today, I'd like to speak about something that I think all of us experience at some point: challenges, setbacks, and perhaps most importantly, how we choose to respond to them.

I think one of the hardest things about setbacks is how quickly they can make us question ourselves.

A bad SAC result suddenly means we're not smart enough. A disagreement with a friend suddenly feels like the end of a friendship. A setback in sport makes us question whether all the effort was worth it.

I think most of us have experienced moments like that. I know I have.

Just before Round 6 against Geelong Grammar, I was told that I had been dropped from the First XVIII Football team.

Now, being dropped from a Football team isn't the biggest challenge someone can face, and that's not really what this speech is about. What interested me was my reaction.

Last year, as a Year 11, I was fortunate enough to play half a season in the Firsts before an injury ended my year.

Like most injuries, the hardest part wasn't always physical. It was watching from the sidelines, waiting, and wondering when I'd get the opportunity to get back out there.

So when I finally returned this year, I felt like things were heading in the right direction. I'd worked hard to get back, played the first five games of the season and was enjoying being part of the team again.

Then I got dropped. What surprised me wasn't the decision itself. It was how quickly my mind filled in the blanks.

I thought, 'How is this fair?' I started comparing myself to others. I felt embarrassed and I found myself wondering whether all those months coming back from injury had actually been worth it.

I started asking questions that probably weren't helping me very much. Why him? Why not me? Had all the hard work actually mattered?

And if I'm being completely honest, for a little while I felt sorry for myself.

A lot of us do that when things don't go our way. We become so focused on the setback itself that we stop seeing anything else.

Around that time, Mr Marshall, who I've known since Year 7 Football and later as Year 8 Geography teacher, heard the news and shared a piece of advice that has really stuck with me.

He told me that nobody would remember whether I was disappointed. What people would remember was how I responded - my attitude, my effort and the way I carried myself.

At the time, that wasn't necessarily what I wanted to hear, but it made me realise something.

I had been treating the situation as though it was only happening to me. I hadn't considered that another boy had been moved out of the seconds because of me. Someone else had been affected too.

And that's true in so many parts of life.

We're all carrying things that other people know nothing about. The friend sitting next to you. The boy across the Chapel. The teacher standing at the back. Everyone is dealing with challenges, disappointments and uncertainties of their own.

The more I thought about it, the more I realised that difficult moments have a way of revealing what really matters.

Not your result, status, or whether things went exactly how you hoped.

But your perspective, your attitude and the type of person you choose to be when things aren't going your way.

I think we spend a lot of our lives believing that confidence comes from things going well. Getting selected. Doing well on a SAC. Having good friendships.

And when those things are going well, it's easy to feel secure.

But eventually life reminds us that none of those things are guaranteed. And that's uncomfortable, because if we're honest, most of us like certainty. We like feeling successful, accepted and knowing where we stand.

But I believe character is often built when those things are challenged. Not because setbacks are enjoyable, and not because disappointment is something we should try to find, but because those moments force us to ask ourselves a deeper question.

Who am I when things aren't going perfectly? Who am I when things don't go my way? Who am I when nobody's watching?

Because that's when attitude matters. That's when resilience matters. And that's when character becomes something more than just a word, we talk about.

About halfway through the first quarter of the Seconds game, the coach pulled me aside and told me there had been a late injury, meaning I would be playing in the Firsts after all.

But looking back, that part almost feels irrelevant. Because the lesson wasn't really about Football. The lesson was about perspective.

From the outside, it often looks like everyone else has everything figured out, but behind the scenes people are carrying things we don't always see.

What I learnt from that experience, and it's certainly not the only one, is that getting caught up in my own negativity was only making things harder. In the moment, setbacks can feel much bigger than they really are. But with time, I've realised that they do not define us.

Looking back now, I don't think I'll remember being dropped. I'll remember what I learnt from it and I think that's true of a lot of the challenges we face.

What feels like a huge moment at the time often ends up being just one small part of a much bigger story.

So I'll end with this: success comes and goes. Results come and go. Teams change and circumstances change. But character stays.

And perhaps that's why some of the moments we would never choose for ourselves end up teaching us the lessons we need most.

Thank you.