

Inspirational message for Border youngsters

# Kerry says follow dream

By HOWARD JONES

KERRY Chikarovski told 400 school students yesterday how she knew at 14 she wanted to be Prime Minister of Australia.

It took her 20 years before she became a member of Parliament but after that, her rise was meteoric and she became a minister in a NSW government and later leader of the state opposition.

She expected to soon become premier of NSW.

But then everything crashed.

A 15-14 vote in the party room in March, 2002, gave John Brogden the top job and Mrs Chikarovski, leaving her to put on a brave face at a packed media conference.

"I had just had my dream shattered," she told the students.

How she handled the blow to her career was a

turning point, and proof that adversity can make one stronger.

Mrs Chikarovski, who left politics in 2002 for a business career, was one of several motivational speakers addressing a Step To The Future leadership forum in Albury.

She urged the students to pursue their dreams and aim high, even where no one else believed they could be achieved.

"Find something you are absolutely passionate about," she said.

"Everything I have done in my life has been done with passion.

"If you set your sights low, you will achieve low."

Former All American and NBL professional basketball player Eric Bailey gave the students a completely different perspective but with a similar theme that goal-setting was important to winning in life.

Bailey, 44, now lives on



● Mrs Chikarovski at the forum. Pictures PETER MERKESTEYN

the Gold Coast but recalled his boyhood in a poor quarter of Los Angeles.

The predominant culture was that "you'd live and die in that neighbourhood and never get

out", unless, of course you were rich or something remarkable happened.

Bailey was diagnosed with a rare bone disease at 10 and told he would never run or be normal

at school, sport or life and two years later gashed senseless after witnessing a gangster shooting.

His advice: "I try every day to be the best I can be."

## No legs, no worries, says amazing survival story



● Mr Coutis

YOU could hear a pin drop when John Coutis arrived by skateboard, climbed on to a chair and stood on a table on his hands.

Probably the world's most severely disabled motivational speaker, Mr Coutis quickly had his young audience hooting with laughter, then submerging again in silence as he told how he shouldn't really be here at all.

His frank and forthright language and mildly ribald jokes

are just part of a character that oozes self-confidence and a positive attitude.

"Doctors said I wouldn't last a day, then it was a week, then a month, then a year," he said.

"At six weeks, they wanted my parents to terminate me."

Thirty-six years later, Mr Coutis, who has no legs, travels widely inspiring audiences.

Next week he is off again to China, where past tours with his

wife, Leanne and son Clayton have drawn up to 21,000 poop in a single venue, and he has been to the US and Indonesia this year.

The man who never started formal schooling until he was 1 is the author of a book, *From The Ground Up*, which explains how he overcame the most extraordinary disadvantages in life to make a special life for himself to live.