

The night Yagoona's son came home

By BERWYN LEWIS

THE Treasurer, Paul Keating, at Bankstown Sports Bowling Club, Yagoona, on election night? Locals, clubbies and old timers could scarcely believe their ears, or eyes.

"Cor!" "Struth!" You could have knocked them down with a feather.

Tables are ornamented with bowls of peanuts. Are they from Kingaroy? Slugs of cabanossi, chunks of cheddar and stacks of potato crisps add to the festive mood. The pokies, normally crunching into top gear at this hour, are curiously quiet and so is the bowls polisher. Perhaps they're resting after a big day.

Tammany Hall was never like this. This is some do!

Paul is a bit late. No travel expenses are being spared to get him from his home in Elizabeth Bay to his electorate in Yagoona on time.

The peanuts shells are mounting. The place is beginning to look a bit like a mon-

key house at a zoo. Officials scurry around. The pretty tables are restored.

Enter Paul in regulation red tie, white shirt and blue suit. He is accompanied by Anita in blue knit. Everyone rubber-necks with expectation, but Paul does a sharp right, heading straight for the improvised computer into which flushed scrutineers are feeding results fresh from the polling booths of Blaxland (Paul's electorate).

Beneath the balloons and streamers the stage is set for swinging.

According to the screen on the computer it looks like things are swinging away from Paul at the rate of 8.5 per cent. But only half the results are in and this isn't an official, tally room computer.

Struth!

Paul compresses his normally composed features. He realises people, the nation, the clubbies, the supporters propping up the bar and his

electorate, are out there at the tables, with the cabanossi, waiting for him.

He cruises the aisles. A handshake here. A nut there. He's nervous. Perhaps he feels out of place. He ducks into a little office. The door slams behind him.

The computer screen goes blank. The computer operator

his badges. His merit badge for work for club and community, his Royal NSW Bowling Association tie bar and his Royal Bowling Association badge.

Has he ever played bowls with Paul?

"Paul Keating is the patron of the club. We've held bowls

Treasurer makes it as a man from the west

enters the little office. The door slams behind him.

Anita, smiling uncertainly, enters the little office. She immediately emerges from the little office. She is no longer smiling. Perhaps she was trying to comfort Paul in one of his darker half-hours.

Mr Kevin Berry, vice-president of the club is wearing all

carnivals. His mother, Min, used to be a bowler here."

Everyone is waiting for Paul to say something.

Michael Stamford, a regular at the club "every Thursday" won't be leaving.

"I feel honoured. I didn't know Paul would be here tonight. I'm really surprised. It doesn't happen every day."

It happens once a year, though. Paul is the sponsor of "The Open Fours" competition held here every year and he opens the game.

At 9.55pm wild elation in Yagoona. Paul's tallying around 23,000, according to the big television set. It's positioned on the stage in front of the flag, it's flanked by posters. Paul on the left. Bob on the right, just across from the blue halo of the electric insect trap.

John Howard is on the screen. He's blowing kisses from the Inter-Continental.

"The Hawke Government has been returned," says a misty eyed John Howard on television. He was off to get a well-deserved drink.

"Go drown your sorrows," cries Yagoona.

Paul and Anita have emerged from that little office. They stand tall, at the front of the room, just in front of the

television set, just in front of everyone.

"Siddown!" yells Yagoona. It can't see Bob on television and it's waiting to see Paul.

Paul stares at himself on television.

Yagoona still can't see.

"Siddown!" it yells again.

Reining in his elation, wearing a conservative smile, Paul takes the stand.

Hip-hip-hoorah is repeated three times. Yagoona is in shock. That's Paul!

Paul, with Anita at his side, begins by congratulating his Prime Minister.

It's a "most historic victory". "It's deserved". He dispenses thanks to everyone who has worked "ceaselessly and tirelessly ... in the face of some very hard, acrimonious comment".

Mr Keating, will you be back bowling next year?

"I do it every year" says Paul.

Paul and Anita sweep away, carried by the crowd.