

**The original documents are located in Box D23, folder “Receiving the "Distinguished American" Award from the Washington Chapter of the National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame, Washington, DC, January 31, 1968” of the Ford Congressional Papers: Press Secretary and Speech File at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library.**

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SPEECH BY REP. GERALD R. FORD, R-MICH., UPON RECEIVING THE "DISTINGUISHED AMERICAN" AWARD FROM THE WASHINGTON CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL FOUNDATION AND HALL OF FAME, WEDNESDAY, JAN. 31, 1968, AT THE STATLER HILTON HOTEL, WASHINGTON, D.C.

President LaRoche, my good friend Al Cordon, members of the Football

Foundation, and friends all:

*Bob Smith*  
*Jucky - why*

It is an inspiration for me to take time out from the political debates raging right now in the House of Representatives and to associate myself with these five fine high school athletes we are honoring here today and with all of you supporters of the game I love best.

First of all, let me tell you how pleased and thrilled I am by the honor you have accorded me. It's a good thing for me I was not on the selections committee or I wouldn't be standing here before you. But I will say that I have always stood up for football and what it stands for. I yield to no man in my admiration for the game, the lessons it teaches, the players, coaches and even the grandstand quarterbacks.

With us we have five fine examples of how football helps to build men. Al Cordon tells me these fellows are not only outstanding athletes but also top scholars. Many of the best men ever to perform on a football field also have been tops in the classroom and turned out to be among our finest citizens.

Football has lessons to teach. Probably the most important of these is discipline and self-sacrifice. Nowhere is this more true than in high school football.

The fellow who goes out for football in high school does so because he loves the game. He puts in long hours of grueling practice, takes some mighty hard knocks, and finds himself "hitting the books" when other fellows have their

homework out of the way and are out on a date or enjoying TV.

They call professional football players the "play for pay" guys. Not to take anything away from the pro's because they do give the game their best and give us the best of the game, but with the high school football player it's a case of paying to play. He has to make tremendous sacrifices in time, sweat and energy...and all for the glory of his school.

But there are personal dividends...there are great benefits from the game of high school football. It helps a man discover the best that is in him and make it better.

The game of football builds men. It toughens a man's fiber, sharpens his integrity and keeps high his spirit of competition. In pursuit of perfection on the gridiron, a man drives himself until he achieves discipline over both his mind and his body. Football is a game that makes a man master over himself.

It's a game where a man must be part of a team if he is going to play at all, a game where he shares the thrill that comes from working with others in a meaningful cause, striving with others to attain a glorious goal.

It's a game that teaches a man the value of desire, the importance of wanting to win, and yet makes him big enough to accept defeat and then come storming right back.

A friend of mine has a boy who has received some 20 offers of athletic scholarships although he still is a junior in high school. But when I asked the father the most important thing his son was getting out of football, he said, "He has learned that you can't win 'em all, and this has been real good for him."

Not that it isn't important to win. After all, that's the name of the game. If you believe in what you're fighting for--whether it's politics or football--winning is the crucial test. Nothing succeeds like success, and nothing is so defeating as a steady diet of defeat. I ought to know, the University of Michigan team on which I was voted most valuable player won one game and lost seven.

But win or lose, one of the greatest gifts football bestows is the spirit of competitiveness.

The gridiron is the breeding ground of quality. That's because football fires us up and fuels the competitive spirit within us. It is competition that makes men want to prove themselves whether the challenge is delivered to them on the football field or in the business world or the political arena.

It is significant, too, that the spirit of competition burns brightest in a free society--where the overriding decisions are made through the ballot box and not by a dictator or a ruling clique.

It has been my experience that men who know what vigorous competition means, in non-professional sports or in any other arena of battle, are men who can meet a challenge in time of crisis.

The best example I know to illustrate this point is the heroism displayed in Vietnam in late 1966 by Army's "Lonely End," Captain Bill Carpenter.

It was no accident that Bill Carpenter had the courage to call for fire on his own position when that position was overrun by the enemy. That kind of gallantry and will to win became ingrained in Bill Carpenter on the football field. His experience in competitive sports conditioned him for that tremendously

difficult decision.

The spirit of competitiveness and the will to win prevail over great odds on the playing field and the battle field--indeed in every field of human endeavor.

Some Americans believe that today their country is in decline. Not for lack of material resources but for lack of a dedication to national purpose and clear-cut national goals.

I would join them as an apostle of doom and gloom if it were not for the kind of young men you honor here today.

We who are carrying the ball right now feel that we are falling short of the goal line. When we look at the fellows coming up behind us, we feel a surge of hope and a new determination to get moving again.

What better reinforcements could we hope for than the kind of fellows chosen for Football Foundation honors?

These young men, selected for their character and leadership qualities, exemplify the ideals that made America <sup>a</sup>~~the~~ symbol of strength and freedom throughout the world.

I do not despair for America because I know that the young men being shaped on the sand lots and high school football fields of this country today will measure up to every responsibility. They will welcome responsibility, not seek to avoid it.

I feel sure they will continue to deserve our confidence because they are imbued with the kind of spirit that made America great.

It's the spirit that Teddy Roosevelt distilled into a few words when he said:

"Far better it is to dare mighty things, to win glorious triumphs, even though checkered with failure, than to take rank with those poor spirits who neither enjoy much nor suffer much, because they live in the gray twilight that knows not victory nor defeat."

I congratulate the National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame for fanning the flame of competition and character-building in America, for honoring young men who demonstrate a spirit of determination, the spirit of honesty and the will to learn and to win...in the classroom as on the football field. Your contribution to a stronger America is great.

Again, I appreciate the honor you have bestowed on me today. I am grateful to the Foundation and to all of you. Thank you.

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