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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
NATIONAL FOOTBALL FOUNDATION
AND
HALL OF FAME

THE GRAND BALLROOM

9:26 P.M. EST

Chris, Your Eminence, Dick Kasmaier, distinguished guests:

It is a very high honor and a very great privilege to have the opportunity of participating in this program this evening, and may I at the outset congratulate the new inductees as well as the scholar athletes.

Bob Hope and I were commenting, as all of these fine young athletes were being introduced, that we never saw such a packaging of brains, appearance and skill, and I congratulate each and every one of you.

Let me thank you, Chris, for that introduction. It is kind of the routine introduction that comes with this office. (Laughter) You know, since I became President, I am usually introduced in a more dignified and stately manner.

On some occasions there is a variation, however. But there was one dinner a few weeks ago when I was introduced by a former teammate of the University of Michigan back a good many years, and frankly I will never forget that introduction.

He said, "Ladies and gentlemen, it might interest you to know that I played football with Jerry Ford for two years and it has made a lasting impression on me. I was a quarterback, Jerry Ford was a center, and you might say it gave me a completely different view of the President." (Laughter)

If you stopped to think about it, there are many similarities between football and Government. For instance, in both areas nothing is ever done without discussing it first. In football you call it a huddle; in Washington you call it a debate, and sometimes the talk goes on for many, many hours without really saying anything.

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In Washington it is called a filibuster; in football it is called Howard Cosell. You know, Howard Cosell takes a lot of kidding, but in all fairness, someone once said, "To me, Howard Cosell will always look ten feet tall." I don't know who said it, but I think it was Abe Beame. (Laughter)

It is a real honor to be here tonight because football has meant so much to me for a good many years. You might be interested to know that I have put together over the years a small collection of memorable football quotations, and I would like to share with you tonight two of them.

The first quotation is from Grantland Rice, who was a great sports writer many years ago, and he said, "When the one Great Scorer comes to write against your name, he marks not that you won or lost, but how you played the game." And the other is from Woody Hayes: "Bah, humbug!"

Incidentally, I wish Woody Hayes -- he is an ex-Big Ten -- and the Ohio State Buckeyes good luck in the Rose Bowl.

But as a former Michigan football player and a 12-term Congressman from Michigan, I think that is about as far as I ought to go.

You know, I may cook my own breakfast, but I am not about to cook my own goose. (Laughter)

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Well, obviously the Michigan Wolverines are not the only team I root for. In fact, back in the capital we have a professional team we are very, very proud of, the Washington Redskins, more affectionately known as the Over-The-Hill-Gang.

You know, it is always exciting to watch the Redskins play, because you are never quite sure what they are going to reach first -- the playoffs or social security.

And the Redskins have one of the most colorful quarterbacks in the history of the game, Sonny Jurgenson. And isn't George Allen lucky to have two great quarterbacks like Billy Kilmer and Sonny Jurgenson?

Well, earlier I was saying a word or two about my good friend Woody Hayes. I think it is well known that Sonny Jurgenson has a much more relaxed attitude toward the game.

I can remember back in 1968 when Sonny, throwing with a very, very sore arm scored five touchdown passes against the Chicago Bears. And as he came off the field at the end of the game Otto Graham, who was then the coach of the Redskins asked him, "Sonny, how's your arm?"

Sonny said, "It hurts me awful."

Graham looked worried. He said, "It is going to be a problem."

Sonny said, "It is. Did you ever try to drink left-handed?" (Laughter)

Well, somewhere between Sonny Jurgenson and Woody Hayes I think there is a little room for compromise.

In my lifetime I have attended a lot of sports dinners, and it has been something of a ritual to honor the exercise, the sportsmanship, the teamwork, the good fellowship that we receive and have received from football, and that is as it should be.

But what about winning? How about a good word for the ultimate reason any of us have for going into a competitive sport? As much as I enjoyed the physical and emotional dividends that college athletics brought me, I sincerely doubt if I ever suited up, put on my helmet -- and, yes, I did wear a helmet -- without the total commitment of going out there to win, not to get exercise, gold or glory, but simply to win.

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To me, winning is not a shameful concept. I would like to think that winning is in the great American tradition.

Two hundred years ago we fought for our freedom, and we won, and for the next hundred years we challenged the continent, and we won.

But somebody once said, "The problem with winning is you have to keep on doing it". And so today we Americans face another historic struggle to maintain our strength as a Nation, as a people, and our economic well being for all of us, and believe me in this battle against inflation, or recession, there are no playoffs, and there is no "till next year," It is winner take all, or loser have nothing.

As I see it, WIN, it is a very small word, but let's be careful not to lose it.

Tonight I have come to New York for a very, very personal reason, and it also has something to do with winning. I have come to do honor and to pay tribute to a man who has won the admiration, the affection and the everlasting gratitude of all Americans -- a superstar before the term was ever thought of.

Bob Hope has consistently brought to our lives the warm glow and the sustaining lift of that precious gift of laughter, and to those of us who served in the armed forces, Bob's eagerly awaited visits brought home an awful lot closer.

But Bob Hope is more than a superlative entertainer -- much, much more. His dedication to the needs and the welfare of Americans has made him a leader in humanitarian activities. It would be a monumental task to list all of the charities and causes that have said thanks for the memory of Bob Hope's helping hand.

Throughout the years I have always looked forward to sharing a head table, a foursome, and many a memorable hour with Bob Hope. I am proud to call him my friend.

And so it gives me a great deal of personal pleasure to present tonight the Distinguished American Award of the National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame to Bob Hope -- patriot, ardent sportsman, indomitable, courageous, unselfish American whose lifetime credo is the lifting of the human spirit.

Gentlemen, Bob Hope.

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(AT 9:34 P.M. EST)