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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE
COACHES OF THE YEAR CEREMONY

WASHINGTON HILTON HOTEL

9:59 P.M. EST

Thank you very much, Bob, Gerry Zarnow, members of the football coaching profession, my former compatriots.

It is a great privilege and a very high honor to be here tonight, and especially to receive this award that means so much to you, and let me assure you it means so much to me.

I think all of us who knew Tuss McLaughry knew that he was an American who never rationed his time, his energy or his determination to help others to achieve athletic and personal success. Let me assure you that this award is treasured even more because it bears Tuss' name. I am most grateful.

Fortunately, I had the privilege and honor of knowing Tuss when he was coach at Brown, and I was on Ducky Pond's football staff at New Haven. I used to scout Brown and then watch those pictures after Tuss gave us a hard time.

He made those football teams at Brown, and later on at other schools, such as Dartmouth, by his leadership and his dedication, and I know from several personal acquaintances that I had subsequently that Tuss McLaughry developed young athletes into great public figures.

Let me say, if I might, that I am extremely humble to be here tonight because I had the privilege back beginning in the fall of 1935 right out of Ann Arbor to go to New Haven and be exposed to outstanding individuals, outstanding coaches.

Our head coach was Ducky Pond, the backfield coach was Greasy Neale and Ivy Williamson was the end coach. We competed against teams that were coached by Tuss McLaughry, Dick Harlow, and Fritz Criesler.

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It was a tough league. All of them were men of outstanding qualifications, not only in the coaching profession, but in leadership among men.

I am also not only humbled but jealous of those who signed that football who made All American. This was something that I never accomplished, never achieved, but I respect excellence, whether it is on the gridiron or otherwise, and I am deeply grateful for those young men, both offensive and defensive, who have been so thoughtful.

I could not help but notice, Bob, the modern ball makes it a little easier to center than it was back in 1932, 1933 and 1934. I just was going to comment until somebody said something that really undercut what I was going to say.

I played football so far back that it was back when the ball was round, and this gentleman over here said, "You should have seen it back in 1906." (Laughter)

I am also deeply grateful for the opportunity to be here because as a former assistant football coach who left the profession, probably wisely, let me assure you that I do know your concerns, your problems. To some extent -- not to the extent that most of you have -- I have lived them.

I will never forget back at the time in the fall or after the fall of 1940 at Yale. We had had a very bad season. I went to a movie theatre that night with our great head coach, Ducky Pond, and the movie that night just happened to be that film classic "King Kong."

You can never forget -- I never did -- that final scene. King Kong is standing on top of the Empire State Building and men are shouting at him, women screaming at him, the police are shooting at him, even airplanes are firing machine guns at him.

I was very impressed. I leaned over to Ducky, who was sitting next to me in the theatre, and whispered, "When was the last time you ever saw anything like that?" Ducky whispered back, "Tuesday. I had a meeting with the alumni association." (Laughter)

As a resident of Washington, the District of Columbia, on at least a temporary basis, I want you to know what a real thrill it is to have all of you here. Washington is a real football town, and you can't imagine the excitement seeing John McKay fly in over the Potomac, Ara Parseghian drive in over the Potomac, and Bear Bryant walk in over the Potomac. (Laughter)

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You know, sometimes I wonder why we don't talk more about the history of this sport that all of us have had some connection and relationship with.

Football is a very old and very honorable game. It was played by the ancient Chinese, the Greeks and the Romans. In fact, many, many ancient peoples played a form of football just to keep warm in the winter, and it still works.

I saw Woody Hayes after the Rose Ball Game. Boy, was he steamed! (Laughter) No, really, Woody, I am only kidding. You know where my loyalties are.

But I firmly believe after this New Year's Day two of the finest football teams in America today were involved in the Rose Bowl -- the University of Southern California playing it and the University of Michigan watching it on the TV. (Laughter)

Seriously, I think both Woody Hayes and John McKay did a superlative job, and if they ever want to come over to the White House for breakfast, I will personally fix both of them a breakfast of champions.

Quite frankly, that is the way I feel about all of you. I am delighted to be here tonight standing shoulder to shoulder with the men who make Saturday afternoons come alive. As Bob Blackman pointed out, I was a member of your great association for about nine years, and I have never given up, never intend to give up my interest or concern for the coaching profession -- and it is a profession, a calling worthy of the respect and very high regard awarded to any other campus discipline on any other university or college campus.

I happen to feel very deeply that the sensitive, thoughtful, highly-skilled football coaches of today have stood far, far too long in the shadows cast by other members of the faculty.

The role each of you play in developing both the physical and moral muscle of your students is a very vital one. It is a role that makes you both father, brother, confessor and friend to young people at a time in their lives when they can use all of them.

You coach, but you also motivate. You instruct, but you also inspire. You set a schedule, but you also set an example. You are not just the big hulking man who turns out winning football teams, you are the very perceptive leaders who can turn uncertain youngsters into winning adults.

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An easy job? Hardly. A demanding job? Certainly. A rewarding job? Definitely. But too often we rate the performance of this job in terms of the big game victories when it is in actuality thousands of the small, unseen triumphs that matter even far more.

What do you say to the eager 150 pound freshmen who wants to play tackle. How do you bend the direction without breaking his spirit? This, in my judgment, is the real contribution that you make to America -- to take our youth and give them the highest standards and goals they can achieve and will want to achieve on the practice field and in the football stadium.

In actuality, you are conducting a living laboratory, a crucible of trust that will make our youngsters, backfield and linemen alike, far better able to run with the ball in later life.

So, tonight, with very deep appreciation, I accept the Tuss McLaughry award, not for myself, but let me share it with all the members of the American Football Coaches Association. You are often unsung, but in my book you will never be unappreciated.

And so, as a final tribute, I have a little poem about football coaches, and with your permission I would like to read it.

"The football coach has a lonely job,
he rarely gets much credit,
And if he hears a kindly word,
this is the group that said it.

"He labors hard to build the sport,
in a manner almost stately,
But the only question he is ever asked is,
What have you won for us lately?

"And so you coaches hear my wish,
and don't sink into the lethargy,
Have some fun. There are lots worse things,
than being burned in effigy."

Thank you and good night.

END (AT 9:08 P.M. EST)