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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
TO THE
UNITED STATES OLYMPIC TEAM

NEW YORK STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE
OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

3:48 P.M. EDT

Phil Krumm, my former colleague in the House of Representatives Bob McKuen, Colonel Miller, Reverend St. Pierre, Willie Davenport, members, coaches, trainers, doctors, administrators of the United States Olympic Team; ladies and gentlemen of the Plattsburgh area:

It is really a great privilege and a very high honor to have the opportunity to be here in Plattsburgh and to participate in the ceremony where all of you are taking off for Montreal.

I do wish to thank the coaches and participants who I had the chance and pleasure of meeting this afternoon. But, let me congratulate all 400 or 500 of you for the accomplishment and the achievement of making the American Olympic Team in 1976.

On behalf of all Americans -- 215 million of us -- good luck and God bless you.

You have worked hard, you have competed against the very best, and you have earned the right to represent the United States in Montreal in a very few days.

Let me say that from every indication I get, we are going to do darn well in Montreal.

As long as I can remember, I have been one that read newspapers, books, magazines, about the American Olympic Team; never was a good enough athlete to compete or make the Olympic Team, but it has meant a lot to me to see the achievements and accomplishments of the American Olympians over the years.

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A few days ago a good friend of mine sent me a book that is the history of the Olympic Games, from the very beginning up through 1972. It is written, or was originally by a great sports writer out in California named Bill Henry, who was a very close and dear friend of mine, and his daughter brought it up to date just a few months ago. But this book is filled with famous names. It is filled with individual achievements and team records. Willie Davenport's name is in it for 1968, when he was number one in the 110-meter high hurdle.

It is a book that shows that the United States over the years has done extremely well in the Olympics. As this book also shows, every four years the competition gets tougher and tougher, and the problems more rugged, the individuals tougher to compete against.

But let me say, in 1976 in Montreal, even though the competition is going to be tough and rugged, from competitors of 120-some nations, as I understand it, I am confident that all these fine young men and women are going to come back with their full share of gold, silver and bronze metals, and we will be very proud of them.

If I could give a little friendly advice: Save enough room in your luggage to bring back that loot. You go, every one of you, to Montreal, with the very best wishes of all of the American people.

But I think it is significant that as we entered this Bicentennial there was an inspirational day just a few days ago, on the Fourth of July, when we celebrated our 200th anniversary. You could feel it where I went, in Valley Forge or Philadelphia, or New York, and as it was reported by the press nationwide, the American people seemed to have a new spirit.

I think we recognize that over the last 10 years we have had our moments of division. We have had some disharmony. We have been pessimistic. But, as we went from the second century into the third, all throughout this country every one of the 50 States, there was a new spirit of harmony, of optimism, a spirit that I think we can all, in all honesty, can indicate was a rebirth of American patriotism.

And as every one of you go to compete in your respective area of excellence, I am absolutely certain that you will do better, because I happen to think that this spirit began to emerge just last winter when our Winter Olympic Team was in Innsbruck.

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There were some people who surprised some of our opposition. They did better than they expected. I can tell you the reports are that more Americans watched the winter Olympics than anytime ever in the history of the United States. Why? Because we believe in you. We believe in our country, and we want you to win, and you are going to win.

We will be back in the States and you will be up in Canada, but you will have a hometown support by proxy. You are going to run, jump, shoot, ride, swim, box, wrestle, and you are going to have an opportunity to get out there and show not only us on television, but the other competitors, that this new American spirit really means something.

It is the way to kick off our third century in the United States, but let me add another dimension, a thought that I hope you will carry with you. You will be competing against the best from many, many lands. It will be a personal thrill, and I think that is something that will stimulate you to an even greater effort.

I have had the experience of talking to two very good friends of mine when I was in the Congress -- Ralph Metcalf, who finished second in the 1932 100 (meter), finished third in 1932 in the 200 meter, and Bob Mathias, who won the decathlon in 1948 and 1952.

They, on many occasions on the floor of the House, talked about what a thrill it was personally to be a winner. But, each and every one of them in their expressions to me said they felt they had a special mission, and I think this is a broader opportunity.

As you represent the United States, you have a unique responsibility to create a better understanding between the people of America and our neighbors around the world. You have a wonderful opportunity, as you compete, to get better acquainted with your opposition, and I can say to you, you have a tremendous responsibility to serve the cause of peace and hold high the lamp of liberty which is represented by the United States of America.

All the wonderful people of Plattsburgh and your fellow Americans know that you will bring to the Olympics the same dignity, the same dedication, the same magic blend of hope and talent, humility and pride, which has characterized American Olympians and made them so successful and so respected over the years.

Good luck, God bless you, and as the Olympic motto suggests, may all of you be swifter, higher, and stronger. The very best from all of us.

END (AT 4:00 P.M. EDT)