

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks on Presenting the Commander in Chief's Trophy to the United States Naval Academy Midshipmen

April 21, 2009

Good afternoon, everybody. Please have a seat. Well, welcome to the White House for your sixth straight—[*laughter*—Commander in Chief Trophy. By now, you guys know your way around here better than I do. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank everybody who is here. Obviously, we want to thank the superintendent, Vice Admiral Jeffrey Fowler. Coach Ken, thank you. We were just talking—he's another local boy from Hawaii. [*Laughter*] He's 4 years younger than me, but apparently we've got some mutual friends.

Congratulations to the co-captains, Clint and Jarod, for your outstanding season. A few other acknowledgements here, we've got Congressman Dutch Ruppersberger, where's Dutch? There he is right there. Good to see you. Congressman Eric Massa—good to see you, Eric. Congressman John Sarbanes, right here; we have B.J. Penn, the Acting Secretary of the Navy. Good to see you, sir.

And I want to extend a special welcome to Lieutenant Commander Wesley Brown, class of 1949. There he is, right here. Please stand. Wesley was the Academy's first African American graduate. He served his country for 25 years. And the brand new, state-of-the-art Wesley Brown Field House will ensure that class after class of Midshipmen know his legacy for decades to come. So we are very proud of you, sir. Thank you so much for your attendance here today.

The Midshipmen, they've got a lot to be proud of, as we know, six straight bowl games, six consecutive wins over Air Force, most importantly, seven straight wins over Army. [*Laughter*] What can I—I'm not saying anything. [*Laughter*]

You showed incredible perseverance against Temple when you trailed by 20 with 9 minutes to go, tied it, won it in overtime. You won an incredible upset over Wake Forest, even if they got you back at the EagleBank Bowl. We won't talk about that. [*Laughter*] Often overshadowed by your fearsome offense is the most improved defense in the Nation.

And these seniors who are behind us should especially be proud: four straight NCAA rushing titles—team rushing titles, something no team has ever done before, in 4 years, 33 wins, and again, no losses to Army or Air Force.

I understand your unofficial motto is "No Excuses, Nobody Cares"—[*laughter*]. That is my wife Michelle's motto for me also. [*Laughter*] But I know that's what makes Navy football so special; you suit up and you play each week against some of the top teams in the country, and you refuse to let that excuse you from taking the coursework or your military training seriously.

And that's why I'm so proud of this team for leading the NCAA in graduation rates for 4 straight years—the most important statistic of the Midshipmen. In fact, I want to congratulate the entire Navy athletic department, because, as a whole, Navy athletics has led the Nation in graduation rates 4 years in a row. And that's an extraordinarily, extraordinary accomplishment.

So I want to congratulate Coach Ken—as I said, from my original home State, also the first Samoan American head coach in the history of Division I–A, just the third Navy coach since World War II to have a winning record in his first season.

Your starting quarterback is also Hawaiian. Where is he? Kaipo—where is he? This guy right here? *[Laughter]* I hear Kaipo is a pretty easygoing guy. He doesn't get rattled easily, performs under pressure. That's the Hawaiian spirit. That's how we roll. *[Laughter]*

I've been watching Mel Kiper getting ready for this weekend's NFL draft. Where is he? Mel? I understand that Eric Kettani—where is Eric—right here? One of the top-rated fullbacks in the Nation, he's a big guy. *[Laughter]* Shun White and Tyree Barnes are serious pro prospects as well. Where are they? These guys? Okay, they look good also. *[Laughter]*

But, like all 32 seniors on this team, they're preparing to trade one proud uniform for another, and that's the United States of America's uniform. And even though all of you have won 13 straight against the guys at West Point and Colorado Springs, you're all joining the same team now.

Football, it's said, makes boys into men. But the Academy makes men and women into leaders. And the bonds that you've built and the lessons that you've learned on that field and in your 4 years by the Bay have prepared you to join and lead the finest fighting force in the history of the world.

I want all of you to know that I have no greater honor or greater responsibility than serving as your Commander in Chief. I'm proud of you. And I promise you this: From the minute you put on that uniform to the minute you take it off, and for all the days of your life, this country will stand behind you and will be there for you, because we know that you will be there for us.

So God bless you, and God bless the United States of America. Let's—let's give me a helmet.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:01 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Ken Niumatalolo, head football coach, Clint Sovie and Jarod Bryant, co-captains, Kaipo-Noa Kaheaku-Enhada, quarterback, Eric Kettani, fullback, Shun White, slot back, and Tyree Barnes, wide receiver, U.S. Naval Academy football team; and Mel Kiper, Jr., football analyst, ESPN.

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