

Administration of Barack Obama, 2016

Remarks Honoring the NCAA Men's Basketball Champion Villanova University Wildcats

May 31, 2016

The President. Hello, everybody! Hello. Everybody, please have a seat. Well, welcome to the White House. And I guess it is the blue-and-white house today—[*laughter*]—because we're giving it up for the 2016 NCAA Champion Villanova Wildcats!

Now, you should know that we have some big 'Nova fans here, from both sides of the aisle in Congress. We also want to acknowledge Villanova president, Reverend Peter Donohue, who is here. Athletic Director Mark Jackson, who capped off his first year as athletic director with a national championship—pretty good job. [*Applause*] Pretty good.

Unfortunately, perhaps the most important 'Nova grad here, Dr. Jill Biden, could not be here. I think she may be teaching, but her husband Joe wanted me to remind you that he picked 'Nova to win it all. [*Laughter*] This is the type of wise counsel that you are looking for from a Vice President. [*Laughter*] Unfortunately, I didn't follow his counsel, and so my bracket was busted. [*Laughter*]

We have the best dressed man in college basketball—the George Clooney of coaches—[*laughter*]—Jay Wright. And today we celebrate a remarkable team that worked tirelessly to make Coach look good in terms of his job and not just his wardrobe. [*Laughter*] His tailor and stylist could not make it, but we do have his basketball players here. [*Laughter*]

So Coach Wright and this team treated us to as memorable a run and as memorable a championship game as I can remember. We'll talk more about that game in a second, but these Wildcats were about more than just one moment or one shot. They had unbelievable defense. They had great clutch shooting. A senior class that won more games than any group in Wildcats history. They had a stable of talented players who were as happy hitting the deck for a loose ball as they were cutting down the nets.

You had Daniel Ochefu, a.k.a. "the Chef"—[*laughter*]—who became just the seventh player in program history to score 1,000 points and grab 900 boards—pretty good. Also not afraid to do the little things, we saw him grab that mop right in the middle of the game. [*Laughter*]

We had Josh Hart who led the Wildcats in scoring. Congratulations, Josh. Josh, where'd you go to school?

Guard Josh Hart. Sidwell Friends.

The President. Sidwell Friends School. Well, my daughter will be graduating from there next week, which makes me cry when I talk about it, so I'm not going to talk about it. [*Laughter*] But it was good to see a Sidwell kid do well.

Kris Jenkins—a.k.a. "Big Smoove"—[*laughter*]—had—[*applause*]. He learned how to shoot from his mom. Moms know what they're talking about. And then, there is Ryan Arcidiacono. Now, I just sped through that in case I didn't say it right. [*Laughter*] "Barack Obama" is tough, but "Arcidiacono"—man, that's a lot of vowels in there, so we're just going to call him Arch. [*Laughter*] A captain since his freshman year, wore the blue and white in more

games than any Wildcat ever, and went out in style as the Most Outstanding Player of the Final Four. So we are very, very proud of him. Give him a big round of applause.

But more than any individual honor, this team possessed something that the coaches preached from day one, and that's attitude. As Coach Wright says, "In life, you cannot control what happens to you, but you do control how you respond to it."

And that's how they bounced back from disappointing tournaments these past few years. That's how they rolled through the first three rounds by an average of 24 points, beat Kansas to punch their ticket to the Final Four. In Houston, they blew the doors off Oklahoma by a Final Four record 44-point margin.

All of which set up an unbelievable showdown with the Tar Heels—it might be maybe the best title game of all time. Just the last few seconds could be a documentary—you had an unbelievable double-clutch circus shot from Marcus Paige on UNC's team. A lot of teams would have had their spirit broken. Wildcats, they took control, they responded. And on a play called Nova, Kris took a pass from Arch and pulled up a few steps behind the line and shot this team into basketball lore. That was a good shot. [Laughter] You know, it was like a Christian Laettner shot. It was like a Jimmy-V.-running-up-and-down-the-court shot. Charles Barkley apparently jumped out of his seat, which—[laughter]—he doesn't do very often these days. [Laughter]

Coach—legendary Coach Massimino, who led their Wildcats to their first title 31 years ago, obviously couldn't be prouder. Coach Wright, on the other hand, played it cool—[laughter]—just turned around, shook hands like nothing happened. [Laughter] But I know inside, he was pretty excited. [Laughter]

So this is a team for the ages, on and off the court. Their grades ranked in the top 10 percent nationally. [Applause] That's worth applauding. All five seniors graduated. In fact, ever since nineteen—the 1970s, the Wildcats have graduated every 4-year player. And that's the kind of record that you really want.

They're also involved in the Philadelphia community, serving meals for those in need, supporting the Special Olympics. A few days after their win, Arch and the Chef heard about a fan—a small boy battling cancer—who could use a boost. So without fanfare, they snuck into the boy's basement and hid in his playhouse to surprise him, which seems a little scary. [Laughter] But their hearts were in the right place.

And that's what we saw all year from this team: the heart of a champion. So congratulations to the Wildcats for an unbelievable season.

And with that, let me give the podium very quickly to]—Coach Wright.

Head Coach Jay Wright. Mr. President, after the championship, we had a big press conference, but nothing as big as this. This is——

The President. There's a lot of cameras around here.

Coach Wright. This is big-time. And on behalf of our entire 'Nova family, I want to thank you and your staff for inviting us to the White House. This is a great day for Villanova University, and you invited all the politicians and everybody connected to Villanova. We love having them here. Thank you for doing that. And your staff has been incredible to us.

You're a great leader, and we want two of our leaders, Ryan Arcidiacono and Daniel Ochefu, to share with you the jersey—44th President of the United States—that we wore this

year at Pearl Harbor. And it was on Pearl Harbor Day, and we really want to thank you. And it says on there, "For your great leadership, your service to our country, you're truly a great role model for our young men." We want them to be great leaders like you. And we thank you for everything you do for our country, and we welcome you to the 'Nova nation with your Villanova jersey.

The President. Thank you so much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:23 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Jill T. Biden, wife of Vice President Joseph Biden; actor George T. Clooney; Daniel Ochefu, Kris Jenkins, Patrick Farrell, and Kevin Rafferty, forwards, Ryan Arcidiacono and Henry Lowe, guards, and Roland Massimino, former coach, Villanova University men's basketball team; Marcus Paige, guard, University of North Carolina men's basketball team; Felicia Jenkins, mother of Mr. Jenkins; former National Basketball Association players Christian D. Laettner and Charles Barkley; and 4-year-old Havertown, PA, resident Blaise Davis.

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Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Arcidiacono, Ryan; Barkley, Charles W.; Biden, Jill T.; Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Clooney, George T.; Davis, Blaise; Donohue, Peter M.; Farrell, Patrick; Hart, Josh; Jackson, Mark; Jenkins, Felicia; Jenkins, Kris; Laettner, Christian D.; Lowe, Henry; Massimino, Roland; Obama, Malia; Ochefu, Daniel; Paige, Marcus; Rafferty, Kevin; Wright, Jerold T. "Jay\," Jr.

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