

Mr. Blair. We have a jersey here. The 12th man at A&M means so much in the history of our school and our program. There's always somebody in the stands in case somebody gets injured. But we're the original 12th man, and I want you to wear it. And we also brought one for your wife. On your wife's it says "Number One."

[At this point, the President was presented with a team jersey.]

The President. Well, yes, that's—[laughter]—I think that's about right. I am 12th.

Mr. Blair. But we'd just like to thank you. And it's an honor for us at Texas A&M to be here, and it's also an honor for us to work with young people like we have a chance in the clinic.

But thank you for your service to the country, and thank you for keeping Bob Gates on

here for quite a while, because he meant a lot to our program.

The President. That is a big Aggies fan right there. [Laughter]

Mr. Blair. But thank you, sir, for everything you've done.

The President. Coach, thank you so much. Thank you.

All right, you guys are going to strike the podium, we are going to get a good picture here.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:52 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Rep. Joseph L. Barton; and Danielle Adams, forward/center, Tyra White, guard, Sydney Colson, guard, and Sydney Carter, guard, Texas A&M University women's basketball team. Coach Blair referred to former Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates.

Remarks Honoring the 1986 Super Bowl Champion Chicago Bears October 7, 2011

The President. This—oh, everybody have a seat. This is as much fun as I will have as President of the United States, right here. This is one of the perks of the job, right here. Ladies and gentlemen, the greatest team in NFL history, the 1985 Chicago Bears. Now, I know that may get me into some trouble in some cities that I visit. [Laughter] But I believe it is the truth.

Cynics might say that I'm only hosting the '85 Bears today because the Green Bay Packers were here a couple months ago and I was not going to be outdone. [Laughter] But as it turns out, after this team won the Super Bowl, it never had a chance to celebrate here in the White House. The day after Super Bowl XX, half a million Chicagoans turned out in 25-below wind-chill weather to welcome the champs back from New Orleans. But sadly, the day after that, we endured a national tragedy as the Space Shuttle *Challenger* exploded shortly after lift-off.

So the moment for the Bears to visit the White House was postponed, and the years went by. But shortly after I took office, someone at the NFL realized, hey, there's a Bears

fan living in the White House. [Laughter] And they called my staff and asked if we could make this happen. And so today I am proud to say to the players, to the coaches, to the staff of the 1985 Bears: Welcome to the White House for this well-deserved and long-overdue recognition.

Now, I was mentioning as I was visiting with the players and coaches out back that in 1985, I had just moved to Chicago. So, unlike most Chicagoans, I didn't really know what it was like to be a suffering sports fan. [Laughter] There are a few Members of Congress and big Bears fans here from Illinois who knew what that was like. But none of us had ever seen what happened that fall. Nobody had ever seen anything like it. This city was invigorated and brought together by this team. This team ruled the city. It riveted the country. They were everywhere. They were like the Beatles. [Laughter] And this was before "SportsCenter" and before 24/7 sports news had really taken off. But they just captured the country's imagination.

We loved this team. Everybody in Chicago knew all these guys' names. We even knew the names of the offensive linemen. [Laughter] Now, you know offensive linemen, they don't get enough love.

But these guys had their own poster: "The Black 'N' Blues Brothers." When was the last time you saw a poster of an offensive line? [Laughter]

But what made this team so captivating wasn't just that they won, wasn't just that they dominated, it was the way they did it. Yes, they were punishing. Yes, they were dominant. But they also had a lot of fun. And you could tell they enjoyed playing together. They were, of course, led by the coach who set the tone, Hall of Famer Mike Ditka. In training camp, he said, "Put a chip on your shoulder in July and keep it there till January."

Some of you may remember that back in 2004, when I was running for the Senate, some people were trying to draft Ditka to run against me. [Laughter] I will admit I was a little worried—[laughter]—because he doesn't lose. Coach, I'm glad you didn't run, because I have to say, I probably would have been terrible on ESPN. [Laughter]

And in a sign that anything is possible, even in Washington, Coach Ditka and Buddy Ryan are here together. [Laughter] Now, Coach Ryan's 46 defense changed football forever. Nobody had ever seen anything like it. Nobody knew what to do with it. And with the talent he had on the defensive side of the ball, there wasn't anything other teams could do about it.

I mean, there are guys who hit, and there are guys who hit. And these guys hit. Mike Singletary, Steve McMichael, Otis Wilson, Wilber Marshall, Dan Hampton, Gary Fencik, and Richard Dent, the Super Bowl MVP, a guy I used to actually work out with in the gym and made me feel weak. [Laughter]

This was the defense that set the standard, and it is still the standard. And I was just complaining to Coach Ryan, he gave all these tips to his sons who are now coaching, and he should have passed on additional wisdom on to us. But more than 25 years later, the standard

against which all other teams are compared is Coach Ryan's defense.

These guys lived to wreak havoc. It was like they were competing with each other to see who could get to the quarterback or the running back first. There was one game that season in which the other team's offense had the ball in Bears territory a total of 21 seconds. [Laughter]

Now, of course, this was also the second-ranked offense in the league that season. Jim McMahon—where's Jim?

James R. McMahon, Jr. Just right here. Do you need me to speak? [Laughter]

The President. No, we're not going to let Jim have the mike. [Laughter] I'm just going to say nice things about you. [Laughter]

Jim played quarterback with no fear and lived life with very few rules—[laughter]—a rock-and-roll quarterback who was on the cover of Rolling Stone. And he had kids wearing headbands and shades to school because of Jim. And he gave me a headband, and I'm not wearing it—[laughter]—but I wanted you to know that I do have it. [Laughter]

Willie Gault might have been the fastest man in football, probably had the highest high fives.

And then there was somebody we all revered, and that was Walter Payton. Even 12 years after we lost him to cancer at the too young age of 45, Chicago still loves "Sweetness." He was without question one of the greatest to ever play the game. And after he high-stepped and leapt his way past Jim Brown's alltime rushing record, he held that record for 18 years. He was also one of the best blocking backs ever, sometimes hitting other guys so hard he'd knock them out of the game. And we are so grateful that his wife Connie is here today with us, so—[applause].

We also tragically lost Dave Duerson this year. And Dave was one of the team's hardest hitters. Hopefully, lessons from his brave struggle with the kind of brain injuries those hits might have caused will help today's players down the road. And we're grateful that his former wife Alicia is here today as well.

This team had nine Pro-Bowlers, four future Hall of Famers—five counting Coach Ditka. They won one 3-game stretch by a combined score of 104–3. And even though they were the youngest team in the NFL at that time, these guys were so confident that Kevin Butler, who was the kicker and still the Bears alltime leading scorer, called his then-fiancée Cathy from training camp in July to say that they had to change their wedding date because that was the Super Bowl day. [Laughter] They were so confident that the day after they lost their only game of the season, they recorded “The Super Bowl Shuffle.” [Laughter] They were suggesting that I should dance “The Super Bowl Shuffle.” Can’t do it. But I do remember it. And in Chicago, you could not get away from this song even if you wanted to. [Laughter] I think it’s safe to say that this is the only team in NFL history with a gold record and a Grammy nomination.

So this team changed everything for every team that came on after, on and off the field. They changed the laws of football. They were gritty, they were gutsy, they were hard-working, they were fun-loving, sort of how Chicagoans like to think of themselves. And Chicago has always been a diehard football town, but this team did something to our city that we’ve never gotten over. We love the Bears. And as much fun as it is to finally have these guys here, we want today’s Bears to come home to the White House with a championship as well.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Beji Caid Essebsi of Tunisia and an Exchange With Reporters October 7, 2011

President Obama. Well, it is my great pleasure to welcome Prime Minister Caid Essebsi here to the Oval Office.

As I think all of you know, Tunisia was the first country in the North African-Middle East region to begin this incredible transformation that we now call the Arab Spring. The movement that began with one street vendor protesting and taking his life in response to a government that had not been responsive to hu-

man rights set off a transformation in Tunisia that has now spread to countries throughout the region. As a result, Tunisia has been an inspiration to all of us who believe that each individual, man and woman, has certain inalienable rights, and that those rights must be recognized in a government that is responsive, is democratic, in which free and fair elections can take place, and in which the rights of minorities are protected.

But in the meantime, congratulations to all of you. Thank you for helping to bring our city together. Thank you for the incredible fun that you gave to all of us. Stick around, guys, and enjoy yourselves. But as I mentioned back there, don’t break anything, and keep your eyes on McMahon. [Laughter] All right, Coach?

Former Head Coach Michael K. Ditka. Wait, wait. One second, one second. We want to give the President—

[At this point, the President was presented with a team jersey.]

The President. Hey!

Mr. Ditka. On behalf of the 1985 Chicago Bears, we consider him one of us. It was a great group of guys. We’re very proud that you honored us by bringing us here. It’s only 26 years after the fact, and five administrations, but thank you. [Laughter]

The President. Appreciate it, Coach. Thank you so much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:08 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to New York Jets Head Coach Rex Ryan and Dallas Cowboys Defensive Coordinator Rob Ryan, sons of former Chicago Bears Defensive Coordinator James D. “Buddy” Ryan; and James L. Brown, former fullback, Cleveland Browns.