

Remarks on Presenting the Commander in Chief's Trophy to the United States Naval Academy Midshipmen April 27, 2016

The President. Hello, everybody! Please have a seat. Welcome to the White House. To Coach Ken and the Navy Midshipmen, I should say welcome back. At this point, you should just add this date to your football schedule every year. *[Laughter]* Air Force game, Army game, bowl game, White House visit. *[Laughter]*

We do have some special guests here today that I want to acknowledge. Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus is here. We've got Admiral John Richardson. We have Superintendent Ted Carter, Jr., and Athletic Director Chet Gladchuk.

Now, Navy Football has now won the service academy rivalry 10 of the last 13 years. In that time, they've won 24 of their last 27 games against Air Force and Army. Maybe it's a good thing this trophy just stays in one place so often, because it's huge. *[Laughter]*

But I know winning the Commander in Chief Trophy means a lot to this team, and it means a lot to me because it shares its name with the most important responsibility that I have. No disrespect to Vince Lombardi or Lord Stanley, but this trophy means a little more to me personally.

I am the eighth President to award this trophy, and this is the eighth and final time that I will do it. And what better way than by honoring this historic Navy Academy team? This squad wasn't just the best service academy on the gridiron this year, it was one of the best teams in America.

The team's cocaptains, Bernie Sarra and Keenan Reynolds, had a couple of mottos that I really like. The first one was "one-and-oh," a reminder to take each game one at a time. So they started the season 1-0 with a 38-point blowout. They went 1-0 against Air Force in another rout. For the 14th straight year, they went 1-0 against Army to reclaim this trophy, and then Navy went 1-0 in the Military Bowl.

All those "one-and-ohs" added up to 11 wins, which is more than any Navy team in history. And Navy's been playing football a long

time—about as long as we've had the lightbulb. *[Laughter]* For 4—in 4 years, these seniors have won more games than any Navy team since the class of 1909. They've won this trophy three times, won three bowl games, and has anybody here ever lost to Army? *[Laughter]* That's sort of a deafening silence there.

The team's second motto that I like is something Coach Ken would remind his players at halftime: "You don't have to do anything special, just do your job." "Just do your job"—I really like that slogan.

In doing their jobs, these players did something special. And that's especially true for the anchor of this Navy team, Keenan Reynolds, one of college football's alltime greats. The only quarterback in the 125-year history of the Army-Navy rivalry to win the game 4 times; holds 11 NCAA records, including most rushing yards by a quarterback; with his 88 touchdowns, no one in college football history has been in the end zone more times than Navy's number 19. And in honor of his leadership, both on and off the field, no one will ever wear it again, which is not bad for a guy who started out as the third-string quarterback.

If you ask him which record he's most proud of, Keenan will tell you that it's the team record for wins. Of course, he'd say that. But here's how I know he means it. When Navy played Memphis in Keenan's home State of Tennessee, hundreds of his friends and relatives came out. They wanted to see him break the touchdown record. On Navy's last drive, the Mids were on the 1-yard line. Keenan was one score away. Coach called in a QB sneak, but Keenan called an audible and tossed a touchdown to running back Demond Brown. So you knew he meant it when he said that what he cared about was the team.

Navy also dominated this year thanks to Chris Swain—or the "Swain Train"—*[laughter]*—who racked up a thousand yards. Austin Grebe, who kicked more extra points than any Midshipman in history. And the calm and quiet

wrecking ball at defensive end, Will Anthony, who led the team in sacks.

So these players are just as impressive off the field. In February, Myer Krah went to Flint to hand out water bottles. Just last week, Myer and Troy Thompson visited with junior high students at Washington Jesuit Academy, a first-rate middle school in a low-income community here in DC.

E.K. Binns was a finalist for “Academic Heisman.” Wideout Thomas Wilson is a first-team Academic All-American. But most importantly, in a few months, 17 of these seniors will be ensigns, and 15 will be commissioned second lieutenants in the Marine Corps.

They’ll be joined in their service by another historic group of Midshipmen who are here today, and I wanted to give them a little bit of credit because we, on this day, celebrate football, but we’ve got a lot of extraordinary folks at the Naval Academy, and we are welcoming today the first students ever to graduate with a degree in cyber ops. And their expertise is going to be more critical than ever to our national security, so we’re very, very proud of them, and we want to congratulate them.

Look, the rivalry between our service academies can get heated. But it is healthy and rooted in respect. They learn early on what it takes to be the best. And that’s what matters when you’re part of the finest fighting force that the world has ever seen. As your Commander in Chief, and as one of the Americans you risk your lives to defend, I will continue to do my best to support all the men and women who have the distinction of wearing this Nation’s uniform.

For more than a century, Navy’s mascot has been a goat. After what this year’s team accomplished, I think you could say that maybe that stands for “Greatest of All Time.” [Laughter]

So I want to congratulate Navy. Thank you for your service. Good luck getting this thing back to Annapolis. I don’t know if you have,

like, a big truck bed that you’re going to be using. [Laughter] But most importantly, to all of you, I could not be prouder of your commitment and your dedication to this Nation, to our security, and to our freedom.

God bless you. God bless the United States of America. Let’s make sure that we get a good picture here. [Laughter]

Coach, anything you want to add here? Come on.

Head Coach Ken Niumatalolo. Thank you. Mr. President, it’s always an honor for us to come to the White House. We take great pride in the fact that we’ve been here pretty much for your entire Presidency. [Laughter]

Thank you for your service to our country. But for me, the greatest legacy that you’ll leave is that of being a father and a husband. Nobody could ever question or argue that this President loves and honors his wife and children. And so we thank you for your service to our country.

I know there have been a lot of great sports programs that have come here to the White House, but as you said, this team is different. We have 32 seniors behind us that have volunteered to serve you, to serve our country, and we’re so grateful for that. But behind you is the greatest senior class in the history of Navy football, and they are ready and willing to serve and to follow you as our Commander in Chief and as our head coach.

So thank you. *Fa’afetai tele lava and mahala nui loa.*

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:47 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John M. Richardson, USN; and Bernard Sarra, nose guard, Chris Swain, full-back, Myer Krah, outside linebacker, Troy Thompson, quarterback, and E.K. Binns, outside guard, U.S. Naval Academy Midshipmen.