

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks Honoring the 2009 NCAA Men's Basketball Champion University of North Carolina Tar Heels

May 11, 2009

The President. Hello. Well, thank you, everybody. Please have a seat. We're not in the Dean Dome here, you don't need to stay standing the whole time. [*Laughter*] I want to, first of all, just acknowledge that we've got a few special guests in the audience. We've got the outstanding new Senator from North Carolina, Kay Hagan. We've got some outstanding Members of the House of Representatives, G.K. Butterfield—[*applause*]—G.K! Brad Miller; Mike McIntyre—[*applause*]—with his Tar Heels cap on. And we've also got Mr. Roy Cooper, North Carolina attorney general, and a Tar Heel alum. Where is Roy? He's over there? As well as Kevin Foy, the mayor of Chapel Hill. There he is, right over there.

Well, welcome to the White House, everybody, and congratulations on bringing Carolina its fifth national championship. And more importantly, thanks for salvaging my bracket—[*laughter*]—and vindicating me before the entire Nation. That first round was rough on me. [*Laughter*] But Andy Katz knows that I came through in the end because of you guys. And I want to congratulate everybody who makes this program run, from the assistants to the trainers, the students to the ticket takers, and Tar Heel fans everywhere—you should all be very proud. And by the way, I have a few Tar Heel fans on my staff. I see a couple of them standing right here.

I want to offer special congratulations to the seven seniors who graduated yesterday: Mike Copeland, Bobby Frasier, Danny Green, Tyler Hansbrough, Patrick Moody, J.B. Tanner, and Jack Wooten. I am proud of all of you. Give them a big round of applause.

I have to tell you, everybody on my staff was really excited about the team coming, except my assistant, Reggie Love. [*Laughter*] Reggie did win his own national championship ring while playing at Duke. And at some point he wants to scrimmage with you guys, so we'll arrange for that.

But I want to thank Coach Roy Williams, and his wife Wanda, who is extraordinarily gracious, and I just had a wonderful time visiting with them. What makes Coach Williams one of the great coaches isn't just his extraordinary record, but his dedication to his players. He's just as serious about making these guys into men and into leaders as he is into making them champions.

Now, I did have a chance to play ball with this crew just over a year ago when I visited Chapel Hill. And I'm not sure whose luck rubbed off on who. I think there was just a good vibe going on there, because they're now national champions, and I'm now President. And I remember congratulating Tyler on choosing to forego the NBA draft and coming back to get that ring. And after winning the 2008 National Player of the Year and getting a championship ring, I think it worked out pretty well for him. So, congratulations to you again, Tyler. Thank you. We're proud of you.

Now, when we played, everybody went out of their way to pass me the ball, set screens for me, let me take a shot. Tyler chose not to block my shot—of course, I was so intimidated by him being near me that I missed it. [*Laughter*] There was one exception, though: Jack Wooten.

He stole the ball from me; he blocked my shot; he fouled me once. Coach Williams had to remind him that there were a bunch of guys with guns around. [*Laughter*]

But just to show that there are no hard feelings, Jack, I want to congratulate you. He made Phi Beta Kappa this year, that's worth applauding. To achieve academic excellence as part of a national championship team is extraordinary. And I know that Jack is interested in public service, and we need more young people like him to be willing to serve our country. So, Jack, anytime you're ready. [*Laughter*] Come on board.

I know Coach Williams instills the importance of academics into all these guys, which is why they didn't just plow through the tournament field; they also had the highest graduation rate of anybody in the Final Four. And what they understood is that being a champion doesn't stop when you step off the court. In fact, they spend a remarkable amount of their time off the court in service to others.

They hold a Special Olympics clinic every year in which they scrimmage with Special Olympians and teach them basketball skills. Coach Williams has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for North Carolina charities. Every Christmas these guys compete with one another to see who can get the most creative Christmas gifts for underprivileged children who need a little bit of hope. All of this makes the Chapel Hill community stronger, it makes the State of North Carolina stronger, it makes our country stronger, and I know this team gets a lot of—a lot out of it as well.

So it's all a reflection on the great character of the program, but also the great character of the coach, just one of my favorite people and one of the most gracious individuals you'd ever care to meet. I want to congratulate you, Coach Williams. I want to congratulate all you guys for an outstanding season. And I got to say also, brother Lawson, you had an unbelievable series, so congratulations—playing a little gimpy and still just tearing it up. [*Laughter*] So we're very proud of you.

So thank you, everybody. Give these guys a big round of applause. And good luck next season.

Head Coach Roy Williams. I coached the national championship game in front of I think 79 thousand—I think—two hundred twenty-two people, and I was not nervous at all. And I'm scared to death right now. [*Laughter*] But on behalf of Chancellor Holden Thorp, our director of athletics, Dick Baddour, and the 2009 national championship North Carolina basketball team, we would like to present to you, Mr. President, your own jersey—

The President. That's what I'm talking about. Let's step out here—we don't want to block it from the cameras. All right, thank you so much. Thank you.

Mr. Williams. And our seniors will also present a plaque that shows that Mr. President—
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The President. Commemorates.

Mr. Williams. —did actually participate that morning.

The President. Participates—that's a nice way of putting it. [*Laughter*] Oh, look at that.

Mr. Williams. These are our five senior scholarship players that make this presentation to Mr. President.

The President. Well, thank you so much, guys. I appreciate that. Look at that. Barely broke a sweat. [*Laughter*] That's a beautiful picture. Thank you so much, guys. Thank you. Now, if somebody could just present me a jump shot. [*Laughter*] I need one of those.

Thank you, Coach. Thank you, everybody. Have a wonderful rest of your visit here at the White House. Appreciate it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:12 p.m. on the South Portico at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Kay R. Hagan of North Carolina; Andy Katz, senior writer, ESPN.com; and Mike Copeland, forward, Bobby Frasor, guard, Danny Green, forward/guard, Tyler Hansbrough, forward, Patrick Moody, forward, J.B. Tanner, guard, Jack Wooten, guard, and Ty Lawson, guard, University of North Carolina men's basketball team.

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Names: Baddour, Dick; Butterfield, G.K.; Cooper, Roy; Copeland, Mike; Foy, Kevin C.; Frasor, Bobby; Green, Danny; Hagan, Kay R.; Hansbrough, Tyler; Katz, Andy; Lawson, Ty; Love, Reginald L.; McIntyre, Mike; Miller, Brad; Moody, Patrick; Tanner, J.B.; Thorp, Holden; Williams, Roy; Williams, Wanda; Wooten, Jack.

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