

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks on Presenting the Commander in Chief's Trophy to the United States Air Force Academy Falcons

April 18, 2011

The President. Thank you. Well, everybody, please be seated. Welcome to the White House, and congratulations on winning the Commander in Chief Trophy.

For the first time in 8 long years, this trophy is going back to Colorado Springs. Today we're honored to be joined by the Superintendent of the Air Force Academy, Lieutenant General Michael Gould, and the Air Force Chief of Staff, General Norton Schwartz. Thank you both for being here. Very much appreciate it.

Most of all, though, I want to congratulate the cadets who are standing behind me. Until this year, no one on this team knew what it felt like to beat Army, to beat Navy, to visit the White House, and to earn football bragging rights over the other branches. Now you know the feeling. They also know what it feels like not just to be a good service academy team, but to be a good team, period. Put up 350 rushing yards against Oklahoma, finished 9–4 after what Coach Calhoun called the toughest schedule a service academy ever played, and to cap it all off, to win in a bowl game against Georgia Tech. That's impressive. Georgia Tech has three times as many students.

Of course, I hear the victory that was sweetest of all was finally beating that Navy team. I'm told that as soon as the final whistle blew, the loudspeakers started blasting Etta James singing "At Last." [*Laughter*] The entire cadet wing—usually some of the most disciplined young men and women you'll ever see—just rushed the field and sang the alma mater with the team.

So this is a group that has a lot to be proud of. But obviously, the most impressive thing about these young men, the thing that sets them apart, is that being a football player isn't what defines them. They're airmen first. And more important than any bowl game or trophy is the commitment that they've made to serve this country.

That's why last summer, when almost every other Division I team was working out and running through drills together, these players were scattered around the world learning the skills they needed long after they take off their jerseys and hang up their helmets.

Quarterback Tim Jefferson was at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware learning about C–17s. Tight end Josh Freeman was stationed in Japan. Cornerback Reggie Rembert was getting up every morning at 3 a.m. to take summer classes, command a squadron of 127 freshman cadets, and spend whatever time he had left organizing 7-on-7 practices for players that were still in town.

And sometimes being away from their teammates meant that players had to come up with some creative ways to get in shape. Quarterbacks had to find people to throw to. Receivers had to find people to throw to them. The conditions weren't always ideal. But as Coach Calhoun, a former Falcon himself, said, "The good ones will find a way."

This team found a way. And now that the season's over, these seniors will have to adjust to a very different life as they become part of the finest military that the world has ever known. It won't always be easy. I've heard linemen like Tyler Schonscheck had to drop 40 or 50 pounds in

order to fit in an ejection seat for pilot training this summer. Where is this guy? *[Laughter]* Yes. Yes, that's a big guy.

But cadets know that what's expected of them is to do whatever it takes. And I know that the camaraderie, the work ethic, the brotherhood that all of you have built as part of this team will serve you well as you defend freedom around the world. As President, I have no greater honor, no greater responsibility, than serving as your Commander in Chief. And as all of you begin your service to our Nation, I want you to know that we are going to do everything in our power to help you succeed and help you come home safe. You all make us incredibly proud.

So, again, congratulations, and God bless you.

Head Coach Troy Calhoun. Thank you, again, Mr. President; for everybody in attendance here today.

And undoubtedly these are absolutely remarkable young people, and with the accolades the President covered, they're, on the field quite, quite impressive. And yet their greatest achievements, their greatest deeds, their greatest quality of work will begin 37 days from now when these young men graduate from the United States Air Force Academy and have an opportunity to be a part of the finest team there is, and that is to lead, to be an officer for the United States of America.

And Mr. President, at this time, we have a couple of young men that want to share a couple of gifts with you, sir. So first of all, Mr. Jared Tew, our starting fullback. *[Laughter]*

The President. That's it.

Cadet Jared Tew. Mr. President, we'd like to present you with a official Air Force football with your name on it and the scores of both the Army and Navy game. *[Laughter]*

The President. There you go. *[Laughter]*

Cadet Reggie Rembert. Also, sir, we'd like to present you with an official Obama jersey. We were going to go with number one because there's no number one on the Air Force Falcon football team, because there's only one "one" in our hearts, and that's the Air Force One. Also we were going to go with 44, but Navy did that last year, so we don't—we didn't want to go with that. *[Laughter]* So we wanted to be a little bit more personal, so we gave the President—Mr. President, we gave him number 23 because he's actually worn this and played a sport in this number.

The President. My old number, before Michael Jordan, by the way. *[Laughter]*

Cadet Rembert. Yes, sir.

The President. Thank you. Thank you very much, everybody. Enjoy this wonderful day. Thank you. Let's get a good picture here.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:46 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Michael J. Jordan, former guard, National Basketball Association's Chicago Bulls.

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