

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks Honoring the 2010 Major League Soccer Champion Colorado Rapids

June 27, 2011

The President. Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat. Now, I just want to point out that I got the memo and dressed appropriately in the gray suit. [*Laughter*]

Welcome to the White House, and congratulations to the Colorado Rapids on winning your first MLS Cup.

I want to begin by recognizing Stan Kroenke and Coach Gary Smith for building such an extraordinary program.

And some of you know, I am a soccer dad myself. [*Laughter*] I have watched my share of games over the years. And I'm used to seeing everybody gather around the ball, and then it kind of pops out somewhere, and everybody runs over to the ball. [*Laughter*] And so I want to congratulate all the players behind me for coming so far since those days, because I'm sure your parents were thinking the same thing—that these guys can't play. [*Laughter*]

They may not be household names, but the great thing about sports is that, in the end, that doesn't really matter. What matters is how well a team can pull together when the chips are down, and that's exactly what the Rapids did.

This team had the second-worst record of any team in the playoffs last year. But they showed up in close games, they clawed back from behind. They just kept on winning. And when the clock ran out, the Rapids were the best team in American soccer.

So this is a testament to players like Pablo, the captain, who played 286 games over 13 years before finally earning a title. Where are you, Pablo? Right here. Congratulations. Players like Omar Cummings and Conor Casey, who were the highest scoring forward combination in the league. Where are you guys? Omar? And players like Mac Kandji who fired the cross that led to the championship-winning goal, even as he tore his ACL in the process. Mac, where are you? You doing okay? All right.

But what really sets this team apart is not how they play only. It's also why they play. They have a love for the game that has brought them together.

This team, obviously, has overcome quite a few cultural differences. This is like a mini United Nations right here. [*Laughter*] You've got players from Argentina, England, France, Ireland, Jamaica, Japan, Scotland, and Senegal. In fact, I heard that the night before the championship, Kosuke Kimura—where is Kosuke? Right here. I understand that he made a very inspiring speech to the team, but it was in Japanese, so nobody really—[*laughter*]—understood what he was saying, but it was really inspirational, was what I heard. [*Laughter*]

This is also a team that makes due without the high salaries and perks that some other professional sports teams enjoy. Players can sometimes actually be seen eating at local restaurants together after practice. A few guys chipped in to buy a fishing boat that they keep hidden in the stadium parking lot. [*Laughter*]

But while life in the MLS isn't always fancy, it serves to bring players closer to each other and to their fans. Wells Thompson likes to take food from the stadium and give it to the

homeless on nearby street corners. Where is Wells? Right here. If a fan wants a player to show up at a charity event or help out with a nonprofit, all they have to do is ask. These guys show up. More often than not, the Rapids staff only finds out about these visits after they happen.

So these aren't just good players, they're also good people. And I want to thank them for teaming up with MLS today to put on a soccer clinic here at the White House for kids from military families. You will make their summer, and you will make their parents happier when they actually know what to do on the soccer field. *[Laughter]*

So congratulations again to the players, to the staff, the fans back in Colorado, everybody who is part of this program. Good luck again this season, and we hope to see you back here soon. So thank you very much. Give them a big round of applause.

Colorado Rapids Managing Director Jeff Plush. So real quick, on behalf of our owner, Stan Kroenke, everyone associated with the Colorado Rapids Soccer Club and Major League Soccer, all of our players, fans, it's our honor to make you an honorary member, and present you with your very own jersey——

The President. That's good.

Mr. Plush. ——commemorating the 2011 Championship.

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

The President. That's a good looking jersey.

Mr. Plush. As you know, the number 10 is the leader, so——

The President. Absolutely. That is me and Messi. We're right up there. Absolutely. *[Laughter]*

Mr. Plush. So thank you very much.

The President. Thank you so much. Thank you. This is terrific. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:55 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to E. Stanley Kroenke, owner, Pablo Mastroeni, midfielder, Macoumba Kandji, forward, Kosuke Kimura, defender, and Wells Thompson, midfielder, Colorado Rapids; and Lionel A. Messi, forward, FC Barcelona and the Argentina national team.

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