

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks Honoring the 2013 National Basketball Association Champion Miami Heat

January 14, 2014

The President. Hello! Everybody, please have a seat. Have a seat. Welcome to the White House. Actually, for these guys, it is welcome back to the White House, after being back-to-back world champions, the Miami Heat.

[At this point, an audience member hollered.]

[Laughter] Now, one of the cool things about this job is welcoming championship sports teams from across the sporting world to the White House. And usually, people enjoy coming to the White House. I have to say, I've never seen folks more excited than the Heat when they came last year. *[Laughter]* I mean, LeBron was so pumped up I thought he was going to give me a hug and knock me over, like the guy in "SportsCenter" who hit the half-court shot. But it was wonderful to see them then. It wonderful to see them back.

We've got some outstanding Members of Congress who are big fans of the Heat. They're from both parties, because we all know nothing brings people together like the Miami Heat. *[Laughter]* It's a—across the NBA there's just a unifying—*[laughter]*—sense about the Heat.

I want to congratulate Coach Spoelstra for the outstanding work that he does; legendary team president, Pat Riley, for his outstanding leadership; and all the coaches and players, members of the staff and crew to make a championship season. This group has now won twice, but it's gone to the finals three times. And sometimes, it feels like they're still fighting for a little respect. I can relate to that. *[Laughter]*

Last season, the Heat put together one of the most dominating regular seasons ever by a defending champion. They won a team record 66 games. At what point, they won 27 games straight, the second longest winning streak ever, extraordinarily impressive, almost as impressive as the Bulls' 72-win season. *[Laughter]* Riley and I were reminiscing about those Knicks years. *[Laughter]*

But as these guys know, winning a title is never easy. In the playoffs, the Pacers put them through seven bruising games. In the finals, the Spurs showed us all that they've got an awful lot of life left in them and one of the greatest players of all time and one of the greatest coaches of all time. In fact, San Antonio had the series all but wrapped up in game six. As you will recall, Miami was down five points, less than 30 seconds to go. The last 122 times that happened in the playoffs, the team that was down lost 122 times.

And then they brought out the ropes. And then Ray Allen saw them bring out the ropes. *[Laughter]* And with 5 seconds left, Chris Bosh gets an incredible offensive rebound, passes it out to Ray; Ray is backing up, he's got to jump forward; hits one of the most iconic shots of all time. And then he added a few choice words about the ropes, which we cannot—*[laughter]*—which we cannot repeat here. But, Ray, I do want you to know that when you say those things on the court, like, people can read your lips, right? *[Laughter]* You do understand that?

Guard Ray Allen. Yes.

The President. Okay. All right.

So the Heat won game six, went on to win game seven, their third title in eight seasons. LeBron James earned his second straight Finals MVP to go along with four regular season MVPs in 5 years. Dwyane Wade, warrior that he is, played through a pair of injured knees, always came through when it mattered. Chris Bosh was there playing great defense, getting the rebound, hitting a clutch shot. Everybody on this team participated.

And from Ray's big shot to the contributions of Mario Chalmers, Shane Battier, Udonis Haslem, Birdman, Birdman's tattoos—[laughter]—Birdman's mohawk—[laughter]—the Heat showed us the kind of heart and determination it takes to be a champion.

And they also showed what it—what heart means off the court. Last year, they raised close to \$2 million for local charities. Before this event, they met with some of our amazing wounded warriors over at Walter Reed, and we're proud to have some of those wounded warriors here in the audience here today. Honoring our troops isn't just something that they do when they come to the White House, it's something they do all year round with their Heat Home Strong initiative. And Pat Riley, I know, has been hugely invested in this, and we talked a little bit about this. His incredible admiration for our men and women in uniform, but more concretely, his willingness to do something about how we support them, I think, is a credit to the entire organization.

On top of that, Coach Spoelstra serves as a member of the NBA Fit team to encourage healthy habits among young people. I know Michelle is thankful for the support that many of these players have given to her "Let's Move!" initiative. I heard that all of you are getting ready to embarrass yourselves by singing some karaoke for Shane's education foundation. [Laughter] Just leave Al Green to the pros, people. [Laughter]

So bottom line is, outstanding athletes, outstanding organization, outstanding team, but also outstanding members of their community. And so we're very proud to have them back. We wish them great luck for the rest of the season, unless they're playing the Bulls. [Laughter]

And with that, I think we should take a picture, but we should make it quick before one of these guys starts yelling at Mario. [Laughter] All right. I mean, sometimes, it's just a bad pass, guys. It's not Mario's fault. [Laughter] Now, but—I got your back, man.

Head Coach Erik Spoelstra. Well, this is a great honor for the entire Miami Heat family. It does not get old. Okay? And what this is, is we put this together before the playoff run last year, and it was a covenant between all of us that we signed, that we would commit to each other, all the way to the end. So——

The President. This is outstanding.

Coach Spoelstra. So we have marks for each win, and it signified each player would mark the win for that game, and the final one was the team one. So this one, right here, you can see "44" and your name right there.

The President. There you go. It was added to it. You know, you guys are winning me over a little bit. [Laughter]

Coach Spoelstra. Getting there. Getting there.

The President. I mean——

Coach Spoelstra. We promise we'll put together another one for you and let you mark it this year. [Laughter] Okay?

The President. Congratulations. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:03 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to LeBron James, Shane Battier, and Udonis Haslem, forwards, Chris Bosh and Chris "Birdman" Andersen, center-forwards, and Dwyane Wade and Mario Chalmers, guards, Miami Heat; Patrick J. Riley, president, the HEAT Group; and musician Al Green.

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