

Administration of Barack Obama, 2016

Statement on the Death of Patricia S. Head Summitt

June 28, 2016

Nobody walked off a college basketball court victorious more times than Tennessee's Pat Summitt. For four decades, she outworked her rivals, made winning an attitude, loved her players like family, and became a role model to millions of Americans, including our two daughters. Her unparalleled success includes never recording a losing season in 38 years of coaching, but also, and more importantly, a 100 percent graduation rate among her players who completed their athletic eligibility. Her legacy, however, is measured much more by the generations of young women and men who admired Pat's intense competitiveness and character and, as a result, found in themselves the confidence to practice hard, play harder, and live with courage on and off the court. As Pat once said in recalling her achievements: "What I see are not the numbers. I see their faces."

Pat learned early on that everyone should be treated the same. When she would play basketball against her older brothers in the family barn, they didn't treat her any differently and certainly didn't go easy on her. Later, her Hall of Fame career would tell the story of the historic progress toward equality in American athletics that she helped advance. Pat started playing college hoops before title IX and started coaching before the NCAA recognized women's basketball as a sport. When she took the helm at Tennessee as a 22-year-old, she had to wash her players' uniforms; by the time Pat stepped down as the Lady Vols' head coach, her teams wore eight championship rings and had cut down nets in sold-out stadiums.

Pat was a patriot who earned Olympic medals for America as a player and a coach, and I was honored to award her the Presidential Medal of Freedom. She was a proud Tennessean who, when she went into labor while on a recruiting visit, demanded the pilot return to Knoxville so her son could be born in her home State. And she was an inspiring fighter. Even after Alzheimer's started to soften her memory, and she began a public and brave fight against that terrible disease, Pat had the grace and perspective to remind us that "God doesn't take things away to be cruel. . . . He takes things away to lighten us. He takes things away so we can fly."

Michelle and I send our condolences to Pat Summitt's family, which includes her former players and fans on Rocky Top and across America.

NOTE: The statement referred to Ross "Tyler" Summitt, son of Ms. Summitt.

Categories: Statements by the President : Deaths :: Summitt, Patricia S. Head.

Names: Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Summitt, Patricia S. Head; Summitt, Ross "Tyler".

Subjects: Deaths : Summitt, Patricia S. Head; Decorations, medals, and awards : Presidential Medal of Freedom; Sports : Basketball.

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