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Remarks to the U.S. Olympic Team in Atlanta, Georgia

July 19, 1996

Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you so much for that wonderful welcome. Thank you, President Clough for making all of our athletes feel so welcome at Georgia Tech. Thank you, Dr. Walker, for all the work you do. Thank you, Teresa, for sharing your birthday with us. [*Laughter*] And thank you, Bruce, for that introduction, for your leadership, and your example.

I was looking at Bruce standing up here—[*laughter*] obliterating the microphone and the podium. [*Laughter*] You know what I thought? I thought, if I'd had a body like that I'd have done a better job in politics. [*Laughter*] I should have gone in for wrestling earlier before I had to do it for a living. [*Laughter*]

You know, the first United States Olympics team in 1896 also did our Nation proud, even though they literally missed the boat for the first games. They got on the wrong ship in Hackensack, New Jersey. But the Lord was looking over them. Thank goodness they set off 2 weeks early, so they got there on time anyway. [*Laughter*]

Well, thanks to the wonderful people of Atlanta, we got around that problem this time because the Olympics came to us. And so I'd like to begin just by asking all of us to express our heartfelt appreciation to the people of Atlanta, the people of Georgia, people who have worked so hard to bring these games here and are doing such a magnificent job to make the world feel welcome in the United States. [*Applause*]

There have been a lot of nice touches to this day for Hillary and Chelsea and me already. For one thing, they arranged for me to meet all the members of our team who are from my home State or who went to school there. And I appreciate that. And I have to say, since I've got all these senior Olympians here, I brought another person from my home State who won the silver medal in the high hurdles in 1948, Clyde Scott. I'd like to ask him to stand up and be recognized, my great friend. [*Applause*] And also tell you, for you sports buffs, he's the only person who ever made first team All-American football for two different universities. And it's not because he didn't make enough grades to stay in the first one. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank all of you for making it possible for the former Olympians who are standing behind me to be here. I owe one of them an apology. Mark Spitz came by to see me earlier, and when I saw him, I could only imagine—I kept remembering that picture of him with all those medals hanging around his shoulders—around his neck. And he informed me that he was supposed to carry the torch in, and he carried it as far as he could, but the Presidential motorcade prevented his final entry. So I think we should acknowledge Mark Spitz as bringing the Olympic torch in here. [*Applause*]

There's so many of the people standing behind me that I watched in the Olympics, that I admired. An awful lot of them, believe it or not, have come to the White House since I've been President because of something good and worthwhile they're doing today—always to help other people. I think maybe the most considerate act I've ever seen one of them perform was my friend Edwin Moses actually allowed me to run with him at one time, which I thought was uncalculated charity under the circumstances. [*Laughter*]

But I say that to make this point: When these Olympians come to the White House, many years after their days of Olympic glory, to advance the cause of young athletes or some other cause they're interested in, it's important that you know that we still celebrate what they stood for and what they did and what they stand for and what they do. I say that because by making this team, you become part of America's team. And for the rest of your lives, other people will look to you in a different way, in a good way. And you will have a chance not just in your field of competition, but you'll have a chance from now on to have an impact on people, especially young people, that can be profound and lasting and wonderful.

For some of these—you here, I'm sure you can hardly bear to think of it, these are your first Olympics. Some of you are veterans. Some of you will still be competing in the Olympics in the next century. But whatever your future holds athletically, I just want to

thank you for your hard work and your dedication, for your courage and your heart, and for your example. Because you say loudly to every young person in this country, if you have hard work and discipline, if you have a tough will and enough courage and heart, you can live out your dreams. And if every kid in this country really believed that he or she could live out their dreams, we'd be a lot better off. And we will be because of you. And I thank you for that.

Most of you probably know this, but when the Olympics came back to life in modern times, it was William Milligan Sloane who took it upon himself to organize the first American team. And then when two of his athletes couldn't afford the tickets to Athens, he gave up the tickets that he had. So he never even saw his dream come to life.

Dr. Sloane's first recruit was a man named Robert Garrett, who had never competed in sports before. So he literally started with only a dream, and he had to figure out what he was going to do. He saw a picture of an ancient discus thrower, and he asked a blacksmith to make one for him. Unfortunately, it weighed 13 pounds. [*Laughter*] But he didn't know any better. He only knew he could not throw it further than 49 feet. He heard the Europeans were throwing it 87 feet, but he showed up for the competition anyway. And when he showed up, the folks took away his 13-pound discus and gave him one that weighed 2½ pounds. [*Laughter*] He tossed it out of the stadium and won the medal. [*Laughter*] So sometimes our handicaps in life can become great advantages.

William Milligan Sloane and Robert Garrett started America's road to Atlanta 100 years ago. The grandson of Dr. Sloane, William Milligan Sloane, is here today. I'd like to ask him to stand and be recognized. Where are you, Mr. Sloane? Thank you so much. [*Applause*].

I'd like to close with a few words to you about your country and what it means for America to be hosting these games in 1996. As I think perhaps you know, before I came here, I went over to your amazing dining quarters and shook hands with as many of the athletes from other countries as I could. And I sat and visited with some of them. And I'd like to just sort of tell you what I think it means for us and, therefore, what you can mean for us here.

Think about how the world has changed in the last hundred years. A hundred years ago, there were far fewer democracies and much less freedom. Now we see the American idea of democracy taking root all around the world, more and more and more new nations. Even 4 years ago, we could not have imagined that a country like Bosnia would be able to redeem the promise of its own Olympics in Sarajevo, but they have a team here.

When I was walking through the crowd, a very tall, fine-looking man from Croatia came up to me and thanked me for what our country has done for Croatia. It was in Dubrovnik, Croatia, that Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown's plane crashed, full of Americans who were going there only because they wanted to help bring the blessings of peace to people in another country.

When I was walking down the sidewalk, a man who is a part of the Palestinian team came up to me and he said, "We are an ancient people, but we have never had a team in the Olympics. This is our first team because you in the United States helped us to make peace."

I was in the dining hall and a man from Ireland came up to me, almost with tears in his eyes, saying that he remembered when Hillary and I went to Ireland last year, and there has been a year and a half of peace that the United States had helped to support, and thousands and tens of thousands of people were lining the streets, happy and gay. And now they have lost their peace again. He said to me, he said, "I'm glad to be here, but I don't want to lose my country. Make it come back."

That's what people think about your country, that somehow we can help to make things better in the world by bringing people together. It was not easy for us to come to this point. A hundred years ago there was a lot more racism in the United States than there is today, and segregation kept a lot of the most gifted people away from athletic competition. Women had few rights, and no nation, including ours, allowed them to compete. Think how many medals that would cost us this time. [*Laughter*]

Now we live a lot closer to our own beliefs. Now we have learned that we have to draw strength from our diversity, that all of our people count and they can all be partners in our great enterprise. And I'm telling you, that shines across the globe. And when you go out to compete and people see that here's this American team and you—half of them you can't tell where they're from, because they're from all different kinds of racial and ethnic groups, all kinds of religious and cultural traditions, bound together by their common heritage in this great land. You don't have to say anything about it.

One of the folks that walked in with me said that he was so pleased to see the spirit of the Olympics taking over when he saw some North Korean and South Korean athletes sitting and talking together at dinner. I've been trying to get the North and South Koreans to talk for 4 years, and I haven't done it. I've been trying to get it done for 4 years, and I haven't done it.

So tonight, when you walk into that opening ceremony, and billions of eyes all over the world are on you, you carry the symbol of all that we have become not only in fact, but in the eyes and the spirit and the hopes of the rest of the world. And just as surely as those of us who work in the diplomatic area or the fine people who wear the uniform of the United States military, you will become a symbol.

I want you to win all the medals you can. I want you to mop up and do great. But I want you to realize that just by being what you already are, you are a source of enormous pride to our country and an inspiration to the world. And I hope tonight and these next couple of weeks are the greatest time of your life.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:14 p.m. in the Olympic Village. In his remarks, he referred to G. Wayne Clough, president, Georgia Institute of Technology; LeRoy T. Walker, president, U.S. Olympic Committee; Teresa Edwards and Bruce Baumgartner, members of the 1996 U.S. Olympic team; and former U.S. Olympians Mark Spitz and Edwin Moses.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

July 13

In the afternoon, the President and Hillary Clinton traveled to Camp David, MD.

July 15

In the evening, the President and Hillary Clinton returned to Washington, DC.

July 17

The President named Barry J. Toiv as Deputy Press Secretary to the President, effective July 29.

The President announced that he sent fiscal 1997 budget amendments to the Congress.

July 18

In the afternoon, the President held a Cabinet meeting in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

The President had telephone conversations concerning the aircraft tragedy in East Moriches, NY, with Mayors Rudolph Giuliani of New York City and John Doring of Montoursville, PA; Gov. George Pataki of New York; Speaker Newt Gingrich and Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt; Majority Leader Trent Lott and Minority Leader Thomas A. Daschle; former Senator Bob Dole; and Jeffrey H. Erickson, president and CEO of Trans World Airlines.

The White House announced that the President appointed Robert E. Peterson to be Chairman, and Scott E. Buchheit and Gladys Gershenfeld to be members of Presidential Emergency Board No. 231.

The President declared a major disaster in North Carolina and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by Hurricane Bertha July 10–13.

July 19

In the morning, the President and Hillary and Chelsea Clinton traveled to Atlanta, GA.