

Chapel Talk
November 9, 2011
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Good evening.

I will begin by mentioning that the timing of this talk is very fitting. With the big win last night, the athletic spirit is in the air. Congratulations to the boys' soccer players and coaches. We are all looking forward to the next round on Saturday.

New Year's Day is always a big day for sports fans. January 1st 1995 was a huge day for me although I didn't know it at the time. In a faraway land called Canada it was negative 20 degrees...Celsius, a meter of snow on the ground and I had just gotten back from a morning skate with my dad and my brothers. Our New Year's tradition was to watch the Rose Bowl, the most prestigious show down in collegiate football. On the scoreboard, the University of Southern California (USC) was playing a school, whose abbreviation was N'West. At that time none of us had a clue what school that was, the Internet was in its infancy so we couldn't Google it.

My dad has followed American football ever since he was a boy in London, Ontario, which is just across the river from Detroit. He was a devout Red Wings and Tigers fan and he passed that on to my brothers and me. As Canadians living close to the border we are fairly well informed about the States, we knew Harvard, Yale and Princeton but N'West stumped us.

As we watched the game, we discovered the school was called Northwestern University. Later we found out it was in Chicago, Illinois and was a member of the Big Ten Conference. Who would have thought on that cold, snowy day in Ontario that N'West was to have such a profound influence on the course of my life to date? A year later, I received a recruiting letter from Northwestern, the school I had never heard of.

Growing up the middle child between 2 brothers, I was always just one of the boys. Don't get me wrong, my mom taught me all the things "girls" were meant to do; knit, sew, cook

and clean and although she never played a sport in her life she fully endorsed and supported the children's' involvement in whatever sport they wished to try. It was my dad who was a gifted athlete. He excelled at every sport he tried. He played for the Junior Montréal Canadians and in the Eastern Hockey League in the 1960's, just like the movie Slap Shot. He was also a nationally ranked tennis player and competed with Arthur Ashe in the Orange Bowl and represented Canada in the Junior Davis Cup. Needless to say, all of his children were exposed to his passion for athletics and appreciation for competition.

My dad knew from experience the importance of being involved in sports and firmly believed that it would instill in us the discipline and work ethic to become strong and hard working citizens. Therefore, I played every sport that was thrown at me; hockey, soccer, tennis, basketball, gymnastics, track, cross-country, softball, rowing and field hockey.

As I entered high school, I had begun to think about my future with athletics. What would I play in college, ice hockey, tennis or field hockey? I was already in the Canadian National Field Hockey Program on a path towards the Olympics but my father had other ideas. Canadian universities at that time did not offer athletic scholarships but the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the NCAA did. In the mid to late 90's, Title IX had been getting more and more public attention with regards to collegiate athletics in the United States. The law reads "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance...". It really was a great time to be a female collegiate recruit.

I had put together my athletic résumé; put my game highlights on a VHS tape and sent them out to about 77 NCAA institutions that provided athletic scholarships. I soon began to receive letters from coaches and one of the first was from Northwestern. At the time we didn't know that it was one of the best universities in the United States. In hindsight everything was a blur from then on; I had to take the SAT, something we do not have in Canada so have no preparation for. I passed the NCAA clearing house, as it was known at the time. I had phone interviews with the coaches, went with my dad on an official visit (to the biggest city in America that I had ever been), toured the campus, was awed by the unbelievable athletic facilities, met the team, and there you have it, I was one of the 1% of

high-school student-athletes who receive an NCAA Division 1 full athletic scholarship.

After a successful career at Northwestern I became an assistant field hockey coach at Dartmouth College where I also received a Master's degree.

Ok, big deal. You may be saying to yourself, "Good for you. Way to go Ms. Wright, your trophy is in the mail." So what's the point of my story? Well, I wouldn't be at St. Andrew's, without my education at Northwestern. And I wouldn't have gone to Northwestern if it were not for sports. My experience in athletics and the opportunities that sport has created for me has shaped my life and opened many doors. This, in no way diminishes the importance of my academic accomplishments. Clearly without a solid education, your opportunities are limited and that is why you are all here at St. Andrew's, for the academics, but the key is balance.

Harvard Professor Richard Light did ten years of research on college graduates. He describes his findings in his book "Making the Most of College." After interviewing over 400 students, who participate in many different aspects of college life, he writes this about college athletes: Of all the student groups on college campuses, "varsity college athletes are among the happiest students. They have many friends and feel closely bonded to the college". Likewise, just two weeks ago in an article by Collin Eaton in The Chronicle of Higher Education, the NCAA reported that major-college athletes continue to graduate at rates higher than their non-athlete peers. While we don't know exactly why athletes graduate at a higher rate than non-athletes, we can imagine that it is connected to the athletes' ability to commit and reach their goal.

In order to participate on an athletic team, you have to be willing to commit, to sacrifice, and to endure both physical and –at times—mental anguish when things don't go your way. You have less free time, more time on a bus, skipped meals, lost sleep, and less time to do your homework the way you want to. Sometimes you miss things that everyone else gets to attend like Awards Night or Friday special programs or a fun SAC activity, but for athletes who are truly committed to their sport and to their team, the rewards far outstrip the sacrifices. In fact, the sacrifices only add joy and intensity to the rewards.

If you compare 2 high school seniors; one who scored a perfect SAT score but did not participate in any extracurricular activities and the other, a strong student who excelled in a sport or in the arts, who would the college rather have? The answer is obvious; they want the well-rounded student who can contribute to a school in areas other than academics. It is the same in the corporate world, who will get the job: the one-dimensional person or the well rounded person with a sense of collaboration and teamwork?

You may not have ever thought about it, but your experiences as an athlete before you came here and now at St. Andrew's and in whatever way you participate in sports after you leave here, are more valuable than you may realize. The goal of the athletic ideal is "a healthy mind in a healthy body". The ancient Greeks believed that the development of the mind, spirit and body were linked, and that a well-educated person was instructed in all areas. An athletic victory was considered a credit to both the athlete's physical and moral virtues. Physical training was valued for its role in the development of such qualities as endurance and patience. The motivation was the development of a disciplined, devout, virtuous citizen of the democracy.

This still stands true today. It is clear that participation in athletics at any level has so many benefits physically, mentally, socially and spiritually.

The physical benefits are evident: when you think that you are going to be living in your body for another 70 or so years, the importance of working out and remaining fit is enormous. The reality is that a small percentage of you will go on to compete in athletics post high school. So take advantage now. Get active; try a new sport. No matter your ability, you will benefit from the experience. You will get fit, have fun and that gives you a lifetime of benefits. For example, my dad's current goal is to be the world champion tennis player in the over 70-age group. This goes to show that your competitive spirit will never die.

Socially, sport leads to lifelong friendships. Being part of a group of people who work hard to achieve a common goal, a bond will naturally be created. Michael Jordan and Scotty Pippen will always have their 6 NBA titles. Ms. McGowan will always connect with her teammates with whom she won an NCAA championship. And the St. Andrew's crew boys

will always hold their memories of Henley in the highest regard. When you get the chance, ask any of them about what they learned from competing in Henley last summer. Think of the leg up you will have in the workplace having been an athlete at any level. Imagine yourself 10 years from now, you are working for a company and you are a manager in charge of a group of people with diverse backgrounds and talents. How are you going to bring this group together to get the job done? Well, you will need to use the same skill set the Henley boys had to call upon to make the finals. You need to lead, manage, motivate, delegate, encourage, work hard and hold your co-workers accountable. In that boat this summer, Mr. Brown led and managed. Rob Rasmussen brought intensity of focus and relentless preparation. Jeff Rogers had the will to win combined with a quirky sense of humor that kept others relaxed. Bobby Moffitt knew how to put ego aside and was willing to row any seat in order to help the team as a whole. David Ashpole understood how to quietly follow and give his best effort. Peter Burrus demonstrated selfless dedication and support. And Jameson called you out if you weren't pulling your weight. Is there any wonder why there are so many CEOs who are former athletes?

In fact, Mr. DeSalvo shared with me a recent conversation he had with Jameson in which he said, "Playing college sports has helped me be more organized. The less regimented structure of college is a challenge. Many of my friends are struggling to get an academic pattern set for success in college and I am fortunate to have crew practice to force me to be proactive about studying and class preparation. I am a happier college freshman for having chosen to be in the rowing program."

Emotionally, athletes learn to control themselves through sport. They learn how to win and but more importantly they learn how to lose. Athletes realize how much they learn from losing. Let's take for example my team. The Varsity Field Hockey has just come off a 1-14 season. That means 1 win and 14 losses. It was a first for all of us, even Duff who's coached for 30 years. Sounds like a total nightmare, right? You're wrong! Did Joanie Oates and Emily Vooris burn almost a minute off their mile time and end seconds away from a sub-six minute mile? They sure did. Did our captains, Nina Labovich and Katie Toothman ever step down from their leadership positions after losing 13 games in a row? No way! Did Celeste Lancaster, Katie Priester and Mary Wilson develop their shots into rockets? Absolutely! And did Nadiri Saunders, our goalie ever decide to not show up and not stop the 20 plus shots she

got per game? Nope! And I guarantee that if you ask any member of this team how the season went, they would respond positively. You have to ditch the superstar mentality that if you don't reach the top, become president, get an A+, be editor in chief; then the effort was worthless. Very few of us become superstars; it's important to learn to be satisfied with doing our own personal best even if it doesn't come with recognition.

Culturally, sport unites people, communities, and countries; essentially it can bring the world together. Nelson Mandela said, "Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to unite in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where once there was only despair. It is more powerful than governments in breaking down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all types of discrimination."

- 1936 Berlin Olympics, Hitler refuses to hand out the 4 gold medals won by American Jesse Owens because of his race.
- 1964 Mohammed Ali won the heavy weight championship of the world and refused to fight in Vietnam and consequently was stripped of his title, banned from boxing for over 3 years and even spent time in jail. He stood up for what he thought was right and made strides for mankind.
- 1980, The Miracle on Ice. The US defeated the Soviet Union during the height of the cold war.
- And in 2011, the US Women's World Cup. Japan defeats the US and in turn brought a country together that had been torn apart by a Tsunami.

These are just a few of many moments where athletics had a significant affect on the world. It may seem like "just" a game but the outcome and subsequent impacts can perpetuate change.

With all that both my parents have instilled in me, I am able to pass on my passion for athletics and promote its importance in the development of young people, like you. And I, like many others who coach, teach and surround you everyday continue to share our experiences with you.

Who would these people be today without the life lessons they learned through sport? Just think about it, what would Duffy be like if you stripped away his passion for wrestling? Would Al look like Mr. Incredible? What did Mr. Hyde learn during his time on the field? How do you think Mr. Carroll got to be so tough? Ask Bob Colburn what athletics means to him? And would Mr. Kahan be leading a team to the State Tournament? Even the athletic achievements of former students who have gone through St. Andrew's should and will continue inspire to you.

Sport teaches you not only how to win but also how to lose gracefully. Whether you win or lose, it is important to put yourself out there. Attempt to be the best. And even if you do not succeed in being the best, there are always lessons to be learned. In life, only one person gets the job, only one team wins the national championship, only one person wins in the Olympics, the presidential race or the Nobel Prize but everyone who competes benefits. Life is a competition. So, start competing or else you'll lose out, especially in your development as a person.

Now I'm not saying that these experiences take precedence over music and the arts. I did ballet and played the piano until I was 17 but it just happened that athletics was the avenue that I chose to exploit the opportunities presented to me. Each one of you will have a different talent and passion that will lead you in life. For example, Kat Haroldson, it may be the cello that will get her to Northwestern just like me, next fall; the same goes for Maggie Rogers and her voice or Courtney Chang; her passion for the violin will expose her to similar opportunities. You can find equal opportunities in athletics, academics and the arts. It is often your high school that crystallizes which one will lead you.

In my case, my education and athletic experience in high school and at Northwestern, lead me to Dartmouth where I had the opportunity to coach student-athletes of a high level of athletic and academic ability. I've travelled to Australia, Holland, France, Italy and England because of sports. The majority of my life-long relationships have been through sport. And most important of all, athletics developed my discipline, work ethic, teamwork, leadership, determination and competitiveness; all skills needed to be successful in life.

Ask yourself what passion will you follow and lead you to opportunities beyond St.

Andrew's? Find something. Work hard to achieve excellence. You never know where your passion will take you. Great opportunities will arise when you pursue something you love. From a small town in Canada to living in Delaware and teaching at one of the great high schools in America? Who knew?

I would like to end by sharing with you an email that I received a few days ago from Susie Gurzenda a former member of my field hockey team. The email reads:

“Coach Wright, I would like to take this time to thank you for essentially getting me to where I am today-playing college hockey. Thanks for making my high school field hockey experience so positive. Thank you for challenging our team to be great, and thank you for being so supportive and encouraging us to embrace these challenges as ways to grow. Field Hockey is a big part of my life at Kenyon, giving me reasons not to procrastinate, an outlet for my wild energy, and a team that has become family. I definitely wouldn't have considered playing in college if I didn't miss the rigorous, yet enjoyably competitive environment on the Saint's field. Thanks for, as Lt. Sarah Abbot remarked in last year's commencement address, for packing my parachute!”.

This is why I am here. And athletics has led me to make a difference. Next time, you think about quitting a team because you won't be a starter, or you opt out to work out on your own when you have a chance to be a part of something bigger, think about what has been said tonight. Sport is a privilege. Take advantage of all it has to offer. There will never be a better time than now.

Thank you.