

Speech Accepting The Man Of The Year Award

First of all let me thank everyone involved in voting for me. I understand that if we included all the hanging chads I'd have won by an even bigger margin.

My son is in the audience tonight to celebrate with me. He's a freshman up in Tallahassee and I can actually use this award as a teachable moment. No matter how old you are you can become an overnight success at something if you are willing to work hard and find something in life you have a passion for.

I found out about this award in a bit of a strange fashion. I called up Michael Bolger to get a list of the All Americans for the South Region and after he gave me them he told me the Coach of the Year and the Assistant Coach of the Year. He then mentioned there was a Man of the Year award too and hesitated. I asked him for the name and he said 'You'. Not hearing him at first I said 'Who'? And he repeated that I did. I still didn't believe him as it had never occurred to me that I was even a potential nominee.

To give you an idea of how my mind works I immediately tried to think of a cute historical rejoinder, but the first one that came to mind was Lyndon Johnson's announcement that he wasn't running for another term. For the kids in the audience Lyndon Johnson was actually a President of the United States but because he came before Bill Clinton your high school history books probably didn't cover him. The quote he is so famous for was 'If nominated, I won't accept, if elected I will not serve'.

After thinking that through for a couple of seconds I quickly discarded that thought and decided it was a pretty neat thing to be given this award.

In a way this is the culmination of a philosophy best characterized by, of all people, William Shakespeare. In his famed play Hamlet he created the character of Polonius, the 'chief counselor' of the King of Denmark's Court. Or what we would call today, a political consultant, or if you want a sports analogy, the assistant GM. The play was written over 400 years ago, so if you kids think The Beatles are 'old school' think again!

Polonius' character is considered something of a windbag by some and a verbally aggressive source of wisdom by others. A busy body, garrulous and impertinent.

Kind of like how the coaches think about me.

Or how your parents think about the refs.

Polonius is given some of the more memorable lines in the play, including some sayings we still use today, unless you are a fan of Hip Hop, of course and prefer something more 'real'. But remember that in Shakespeare's day there was no 24-hour news cycle or daily newspaper. Plays were one way that knowledge and history was passed down through the ages back then.

You might have actually heard of a few of Polonius' pronouncements:

“Neither a borrower nor a lender be” – unless you make your living in banking

“Brevity is the soul of wit” – Which is why our current President has a hard time with comedy.

“Though this is madness, yet there is method in it” – what your coach might say to you to justify the extra laps after practice.

And the most important one to me . . . maybe the most important line I’ve ever read in Shakespeare or anywhere else:

“To thine own self be true”

I want the kids here to listen to this part in particular.

Life is not won or lost. A lacrosse game might be, a job interview could be, and the heart of the one you love certainly is.

But ‘LIFE’ is lived, it is not won or lost.

It’s experienced, sampled, tasted, savored.

It’s frustrating and gratifying.

It will move you to emotion, anger and love.

But in the end the most important thing is are you able to get up in the morning, look at the mirror and be able to say “I like what I see”. Of course you need to think about how you are viewed by others . . . your spouse, your parents, your teachers, your boss, your clients, your friends and your kids. But if you don’t like yourself, the rest won’t make up for it.

To Thine Own Self Be True

It’s fair to say that the reason I am standing here today accepting this award is because I took those words to heart. My love for this sport has been around a long time. It started in the 70’s, growing up on Long Island, when WPIX, Channel 11, started carrying the feed from Baltimore for the college game of the week. This strange sport, played by schools I really hadn’t heard of, like Johns Hopkins, Washington & Lee, and a couple of others.

I grew up in the only area of Long Island that really didn’t have much in the way of high school or youth lacrosse, the south shore near Jones Beach. I suspect that looking back we didn’t have it because so many of us were Bar-Mitzvahed and the Jewish mothers of that time didn’t want us playing a sport that we could get hurt at. And we were used to hearing from our Mom’s to ‘put that stick down before you poke someone’s eye out’.

Not something that leads itself to gravitating towards this sport.

But then I was lucky to find that next step in truly appreciating this sport; I somehow ended up attending a college KNOWN for its lacrosse.

By accident.

I really had no idea when I applied there.

Kids, you have no idea how lucky you are to have today's technology and the ease of information at your fingertips. In my junior year of high school, after taking the SAT's (and being told by my guidance counselor I should be ashamed of my grade point average) I was told to go to the library (the library system still exists, right?) and get out Peterson's College Guide and go through it to see what colleges I might want to apply to.

Being the ignorant kid so many of us were back then I spent about 20 minutes thumbing through it, wrote some names down and went back the next day with the list. After studying it a little my counselor asked a simple question that I had no answer for.

"Why are all these schools located in Ohio, start with the Letter H, and are religiously-affiliated?"

You see, in that day and age it was assumed you would just go to the most prestigious school you got into, regardless of whether it was right for you or not,

because your parents and grandparents wanted bragging rights for the neighborhood and their circle of friends.

Somehow, I ended up at Hobart College, coming off their 1976 National Championship in Division II-III, which tells you something about the sport back then that it was one champion for both. And if I forgot that fact it was plastered on a billboard (you remember what a billboard is right? If not, imagine your iPad being frozen permanently with an Injury Attorney's ad on it). When you approached cosmopolitan Geneva, New York from the Turnpike exit you saw a sign that said "Welcome to Geneva, NY, the Lake Trout Capital of the World", "Home of Hobart College, the 1976 NCAA Division II-III National Lacrosse Champions".

Wow . . . the Lake Trout Capital of the World!

I've really arrived. But then it hit me, how would they know that? I've never seen a Gallup poll on that one.

But I really hit a home run. Not only was the school the right place for me but I was on my way to witnessing, as a freshmen, the 1977 Hobart season as my first real introduction to lacrosse.

How good was that team? Just one score . . . Hobart 24 – Syracuse 8.

Take that Casey.

And a national championship repeat to boot. That's how it all got started for me.

And then I found out I could make some money at the same time! So I started filming the games for Coach Dave Urick, a terrific man with a terrific record at Hobart. Something like 12 straight national championships. He also had a pretty good wrist shot when we played floor hockey . . .

But after graduation I kind of fell away from it some as the only way you could see any lacrosse on TV was when the championship game was televised on a three-week time delay on CBS. And if you were lucky they showed about 20 minutes of action.

We weren't exactly on the radar of the national sports fan.

But then a funny thing happened. The sport started to attract good-sized crowds for championship weekend and eventually the rest of the sports world had to take notice. Lacrosse scenes started to pop up in the popular culture. Oz and Stiffler were team mates in the first American Pie movie. Kyra Sedgwick starred in The Closer and in the second season moves in with her boyfriend, a former lacrosse player. If you look closely at the lacrosse stick she found when he moved in you'll see it's a Hobart stick because when they were looking for props she borrowed her husband's nephew's stick and he was a Hobart student (for those who like such trivia Kyra is married to Kevin Bacon). Vince Flynn's great action character, Mitch Rapp, is portrayed as a former Syracuse All-American. Teen Wolf

was remade by MTV with a lacrosse player instead of a basketball player. The movie Toe to Toe revolves around lacrosse.

And of course we had Crooked Arrows, which unfortunately only a few of us bothered to watch in the theatre.

And even video games! On March 31st this year Lacrosse Arcade 2014 was released for Android devices. Partake of it gamers!

So we fast forward to about 7 years ago. I'm living in Boca and going through a tough divorce and needed something to get my mind off of it and decided to see if lacrosse was being played at the high school level and lo and behold I came across the Saint Andrew's program.

So I started going to the games and adopted them as my team to root for, following them through the years, watching as they played the tough out of state games, finally winning some of them, and paying attention to their annual run to the championship, which reminded me of my college years.

About the same time my son spent a year playing Boca Jets Lacrosse, where he was coached by Dean Borg, who I ran into at the Saint Andrew's games and eventually struck up a friendship with.

One thing led to the next and one day Dean told me about the website and he thought I might be a good person to contribute to it so about two years ago at the state finals he introduced me to Ernie Mahler and the rest is pretty much history.

It started as just a fun thing to do, cover some games and get back into print. I was involved with the college newspaper and thought it was fun to get to write about something I hadn't done before.

And then it took an interesting turn as I realized just how many stories there were out there to write about!

This is a sport that has a lot of elements to it.

Speed

Physical Play

Thinking on the run

Team play

Courage

Lots of scoring

Drama

In some instances the stories write themselves. As ABC Sports used to say, The Human Drama of Athletic Competition.

Just look at what I get to write about!

Mikey Stolzenberg and Austin Reynolds

Benjamin and Vero's overtime game last year

Lake Highland's and Saint Andrew's seniors going out in style

So many people appreciating what we were doing with the site.

So many competitive teams

So many new people to meet

This game brings out so much in its participants

- A Rodormer strip, an O'Connor groundball and a Sampsen body check
- Alec Carreras and Sebi Cancio dodging 0-60 in 2 seconds
- Trevor Keena's subtle stick positions and Alex Tuminello's rockets
- Danny and Shane game-planning against each other and TRYING to come up with something new
- St. Thomas' hamburgers and Melbourne Central's hot dogs. But no one yet has tried Vichysoisse . . . it'll work! Cold Soup at games!
- Romeo Cuvin, the head coach at Coral Springs Charter, who ended up coaching the team because his son convinced the school to let him start a team, even though he was only in 8th grade at the time
- So many seniors that have given everything they can

Chris Holly, honored this year as Coach of the Year. Spent many games as a kid in Boswell Field. And last year when the Kraus-Simmons trophy came home we shared a mini-celebration on the field as the final score popped up on the last phone refresh.

Having breakfast with Chris Kane and Jeff Goldberg together. If you know the two of them it proves that opposites can attract. Chris is as laid back as it gets and Jeff's only speed is turbo-charged.

And now we even have our own professional lacrosse franchise. Think about that for a second. This area is so lacrosse crazy a professional league with only 8 teams chose us for one of them.

To play in the SUMMER.

I have only one thing to add to that. BEAT NEW YORK.

Heck, Tom West was nice to me this year . . . and I reciprocated, until I found out he was a NY Ranger fan . . .

When we look at the All-Americans celebrated here tonight we see what is really good about this country. That once again it shows that with hard work, self-discipline and the will to achieve you can accomplish great things.

We all salute you AND your families; this achievement was not realized in a vacuum. All the days of driving you to practice, summer camps, rooting in the stands. You know, it's a lot easier to play in the game than to root from the stands.

When you get to college remember that this same effort works for school work.

Be an All-American at life too.

And never forget to be true to your self.

This is where I talked off the cuff about the high hits and late cheap shots

I'd like to close these words with some heart-felt thank you's:

To Brian and Ernie for giving me this forum to do something I love and to give me the freedom to take lacrosse writing in a little different direction.

To Wells Dusenbury, my podcast partner for also providing me and the web site with the opportunity to spread our wings in a different way. When the coaches convene next year please keep in mind that he also does an awful lot to publicize this sport.

By the way, our readers and listeners might be interested in knowing that our podcasts are the NUMBER ONE podcast listened to on ESPN radio down here, not the Heat, not Dolphins or High School Football or anything else, showing how interested you all are in learning about what is going on here.

I'd like to thank the Palm Beach Post, but it looks like they forgot to cover this lacrosse event too . . .

Thank you to all the Coaches who honor me with this award. Give me about 40 years and I'll find a way to name each of you Coach of the Year to reciprocate. You've always been mindful of helping me out with information when I needed it and you've always been respectful to me after the game, even in disappointing defeat. Fans sometimes forget that 199 of the 200 head coaches lose their last game of the year and it hurts you to do so. You put in a labor of love for not a lot of money and much of the time you are taken for granted.

I will never do that.

Thanks to all of you who read our site, contribute information and article ideas and pictures. You have no idea how much we appreciate your kind words for us and the support you give in helping us take this site and the whole idea of spreading the lacrosse gospel. Readership has exploded this year. Keep reading!

And keep caring.

Thank you to my son Alex, who came down from Tallahassee to attend this dinner. If it wasn't for that one year of Boca Jets this whole thing might not have ever happened. Many of my closest friends in the lacrosse world have heard me brag on you, so remember to keep living up to it!

Lastly, to my girlfriend Jean, who magically puts up with my February – May obsession patiently. And now also has to be patient for a few Saturdays during the summer season too. We've been together for five years and thankfully she's quite a sports fan too. Here's to the next five years together as we continue to see where this surprise journey takes us.

Thank you again for this wonderful honor and God Bless you all!