

Remarks on Occasion of Presentation of Distinguished American Award by State of Maine
Chapter, National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame, Bowdoin College,
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To be honored by those in one's own calling is one of life's crowning pleasures. But to be honored by citizens outside of one's profession has a sweetness of its own. I am deeply humbled and appreciative.

One of the keys to the independence of the federal judiciary is life tenure, or, more accurately, tenure during good behavior. This means that we can be impeached only for high crimes or misdemeanors. I am grateful for this protection because I am assuming that my appearance here tonight does not quite reach that level, although it may constitute false pretenses, or impersonating a football player.

The story of my affair with football is one of unrequited love. It is not likely to be familiar to all of you whose courtship has been so well rewarded. Mine is a story of vaulting ambition and brainless dedication. Bear in mind that I was short, slow, soft, and chubby. With that formidable equipment, I went out for guard at Lewiston High School, where, mercifully, I was spared all bodily contact and thus preserved for higher education. Like the moth to the flame, as a Bates freshman, I went out, if you can believe, for center. Soon, for humanitarian reasons, I was shifted to quarterback.

What I chiefly recall from that fall was my trying to memorize all the plays, in the event that I ever left the bench and had to call them. We had a three figure system: one for the ball carrier, one for the hole, and one for the type of play. Before a game I would sweat the night through, trying to remember how play 134 differed from 413. Not to worry. I never left the bench. In a diary I kept at the time, this pathetic entry recorded the last practice of the season:

Ran plays. On the very last play, caught a pass. (Hope Coach saw it.)

Which, of course, he didn't. Instead, he did me the grave disservice of telling me that he liked my spirit, was sorry he couldn't have used me, and saying that he hoped I'd try again next year. Which, of course, I did.

Early in this sophomore season, our coach, the legendary Dave Morey, former Dartmouth All American, took me aside. My diary entry: "Coach gave me one half a call down, one half encouragement. Said I should try my darnedest because little guys can make teams." Well, that year saw me make, in scrimmage only, of course, one line plunge, one good tackle, and one pass interception. But I reached the peak of my career as the Bowdoin game approached. Bowdoin's coach was the equally legendary Adam Walsh, one of Knute Rockne's Seven Mules. He had an exotic, fancy stepping, loud barking quarterback, utterly unlike anything ever seen on local gridirons. To see him perform for the first time was deeply unsettling. Coach Morey, ever a deep thinker, sought to defuse this psychological threat to an unsuspecting team's equilibrium.

I was the chosen instrument. Coach Dave described the cockatoo antics of the Bowdoin back and made me throw caution and modesty to the winds. So when we scrimmaged, the varsity saw and heard this insignificant runt strut and crow like a bantam rooster and execute an ultra fancy, high stepping shift just before the ball was snapped. Dumbfounded, the entire team stood rooted to the spot as our scrub team made an impressive gain. Only after several of these capers did the varsity recover its senses and get down to business. It had been inoculated. Unfortunately, it still lost the game.

Perhaps the real moral of my tale lies in the Bates-Bowdoin game of the following year. I was no longer out for but out of football. I was now a cross-country runner, which requires nothing but the persistence of a tortoise. But, as an officer of our men's Student Council, I had been charged with planning, in conjunction with Coach Dave, a great Alumni Weekend rally on the eve of the Bowdoin game.

We invited as our chief speaker one of Bates' most distinguished alumni, the editor of the Christian Science Monitor, and a renowned international debater, Erwin Canham. It is doubtful that he knew the difference between a football and a pingpong ball. Indeed, he admitted, to use his words, his "unfamiliarity with the requirements of a speaker for a football rally." Then he delivered his message, which was that it didn't matter at all who won as long as everyone displayed courage and sportsmanship. Very mature, very wise, very inappropriate. As you can imagine, this had the effect of sprinkling the entire audience with buckets of tiny ice cubes.

Next day, Bates beat Bowdoin, 21-0. And Coach Morey was carried off the field in what the college paper described as "the greatest ovation ever accorded a Bates coach on the field of battle." A few days later, the campus paper contained the following editorial:

It is with bowed head that we admit that Bowdoin is a better college, has a better team, and showed better spirit than Bates. . . [for] the speaker at Friday night's rally went to great length to prove that the losing team is the superior of the two. . . . Therefore, we are inferior to Bowdoin whenever we win.

This, then, was my supreme contribution to Bates football -- to engage a rally speaker whose message would so infuriate the team that it, and its rooters, would be invincible. This illustrates Milton's saying, "They also serve who only stand and wait."

You may well be wondering, if football and I were such an odd couple, what did I receive -- and what can I give you? You have every hope for a much more rewarding future in the sport. For this I envy you. But, even more important, when your contests and your triumphs are ended, I hope you will take with you for the rest of your life this one thing: the blessing of fully engaged and absorbing, creative, and responsive teamwork. At its best a football team exemplifies this -- when each player fills his position not only adequately, but often playing above his head and with complete sensitivity and fealty to his teammates, when strategy and tactics are perfectly carried out, all the more since all may have had an input, and when the supreme joy of contest is realized in joining with one's comrades in arms wholeheartedly in a good cause.

I have had the good fortune to savor this all through my life since football. As a young lawyer in Lewiston, I experienced this in many civic activities. As a partner in my Portland law firm, I relished the advice and support of my partners. In politics and in the Congress I rejoiced in joining battle with my comrades. And for many years as an appellate judge I have been sustained and stimulated by my colleagues. In all of these activities, which, as one becomes older, bear the label of collegiality, there has been the essence of teamwork -- self denying, fully giving, at times following, at times leading, always cherishing those who, you knew, would always be there when you needed them. It is one of the enduring and supreme blessings of life.

May you take this with you and keep it always.