

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:53 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Amirah Delwin, student, Washington-Lee High School, and her mother Kezia Truesdale; Tim Craig, father of student Brendan Craig; Elma Molina, mother of student Rina Castaneda; Gregg Robertson, principal, Washington-Lee High

School; Reps. Todd W. Akin and W. Joseph Walsh; Brendan Buck, press secretary for Speaker of the House of Representatives John A. Boehner; and James T. Fallon, Jr., host, NBC's "Late Night With Jimmy Fallon" program. He also referred to his sister Maya Soetoro-Ng.

Remarks Honoring the NCAA Men's Basketball Champion University of Kentucky Wildcats

May 4, 2012

The President. Thank you. Come on over here, Coach. Thank you very much. Thank you so much. Everybody, have a seat. Have a seat. Have a seat. Welcome to the White House, and congratulations to the Kentucky Wildcats on your eighth national championship. Eighth national champ—that's not bad. [Laughter] That's not bad. Although, this is the first in 14 years. [Laughter]

Now, this was the fourth year that I filled out my bracket on ESPN. And what I've learned is that if I make the right picks, I look like a genius. But if things go the other way, then a team like Kentucky gets to come to my house and remind me in person that I was wrong. [Laughter] So it is a double-edged sword.

Of course, I knew Kentucky was good. I had them in the championship game. But in the end, I thought, these—they got all these freshmen. These guys are too young. [Laughter] And keep in mind, at this time last year, three of the Wildcats' five starters were still in high school. Michael Kidd-Gilchrist couldn't even vote yet. [Laughter]

But let's face it, sometimes talent triumphs experience. And sometimes, a bunch of young players, even if they're used to being big fishes in their ponds, even if they've never played together before, they can buy into a system, they understand the concept of team, and they do something special right away. And that's exactly what happened in Kentucky.

Of course, a lot of credit for that goes to their outstanding coach, Coach Calipari. My understanding is, when he recruited these

players, Coach started off by asking them some simple questions: Do you want to win a national title? The answer was yes, apparently. [Laughter] Can you do it by yourself? The answer was no. He took a roster with six former All-Americans and got them to do something even more impressive, and that was share the ball. So you had six players average double figures in points this year; nobody averaged more than nine shots a game. If you didn't play defense, you didn't play.

And as a result, the Wildcats started winning. At one point, they won 24 straight. And they spent the final 8 weeks of the season ranked number one. They cruised through the tournament, trailed for less than 10 minutes total, before beating Kansas in front of 70,000 fans at the Super Dome. So that's a pretty good run.

Most importantly, though, they did it as a team. And nobody, I think, was a better example of that than Anthony Davis, who—everybody kept on remarking on it. Nobody has ever seen somebody who didn't have a lot of field goals and yet still controlled the game. Still ended up being the most valuable player: racked up 16 rebounds, 6 blocks, 3 steals. That doesn't count all the intimidation factor—[laughter]—that the other team had to go through. Of course, that's what happens when you grow 8 inches between your sophomore and senior years of high school. In fact, he has grown an inch since he got to the White House. [Laughter] His pants are already like this. [Laughter] Just got a new suit, you know, and his—[laughter].

When Anthony needed help, Doron Lamb stepped up, dropping 22 points in the biggest game of his career. First off the bench, Darius Miller, who became the first player in Kentucky history to be named Mr. Basketball, win a State championship in high school and win a national title with the Wildcats. I'm pretty sure Coach Cal is right that if Darius decides to run for Governor, he'll do all right in Kentucky. [Laughter] I also want to congratulate Darius and Eloy Vargas for getting their diplomas on Sunday. That's worth a big round of applause.

And I want to congratulate them for doing their share of community service in the Lexington community, from packing backpacks full of food for kids who don't have enough to raising money for tornado victims.

So these guys do it all. Everybody's got to take a good look now, because a whole bunch of these guys are going on to the NBA. Who knows, one of them might end up here in Washington. We'll take him.

Coach Cal is back on the recruiting trail, and if the next group of Wildcats is anything like this one, then I might see them again sometime soon.

So congratulations again to all the fans, to all the faculty, to all the—everybody who helps to make Kentucky such an outstanding university. Most of all, congratulations to the team and to Coach Calipari.

Head Coach John V. Calipari. Thank you very much. Mr. President, on behalf of the Big Blue Nation, the Commonwealth of Kentucky, we are honored and humbled to be here. This team, when they won that championship on that court in New Orleans, they were jumping up and down not saying: "We did it! We won!"

The President's Weekly Address

May 5, 2012

This week, I traveled to Afghanistan to thank our troops serving far from home and to sign a historic agreement that will help us complete our mission and end the war.

As Commander in Chief, nothing is more humbling or inspiring than the chance to spend some time with our troops. At Bagram

They were saying: "We're going to the White House! We're going to the White House!" [Laughter] Because they wanted to meet you.

As a member of our team, I'd like our seniors, Darius Miller, to give you his number-one jersey that he wore for 4 years.

The President. That's great.

Coach Calipari. Eloy Vargas has a ball that he—the team has signed, and the young—[applause]. There's the number-one jersey.

The President. That's a good-looking jersey right there.

Coach Calipari. And the young guy from your home city of Chicago—

The President. Chicago! [Laughter]

Coach Calipari. —would like to present you with the 2012 National Championship ring, and I might say, it is the first.

The President. Hold that up. Look at that. That's all right. That's beautiful, man. Fantastic. Well, this is some nice gear. [Laughter] I have to say, by the way, after the game, I called the coach and the team, and I mentioned to Anthony that I had actually been to his school, a small charter school in Chicago, when I was still a Senator. And I had spoken to the kids there, and he told me, yes, I was there. [Laughter] But I didn't recognize him. He looked a little different apparently 4 years ago. So what a wonderful set of gifts. I appreciate that.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:03 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Michael Kidd-Gilchrist, Anthony Davis, and Eloy Vargas, forwards, and Doron Lamb and Darius Miller, guards, University of Kentucky men's basketball team.

Air Base, I visited with some of our outstanding men and women in uniform. I thanked them for their extraordinary service. And I let them know that America honors their sacrifice.

Because of their bravery and dedication, the tide of war has turned in Afghanistan. We've broken the Taliban's momentum. We've built