

THE KNIGHT COMMISSION ON INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS PRESENTS  
A SUMMIT ON THE COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC EXPERIENCE

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Dorothy Betts Marvin Theater  
The Marvin Center  
The George Washington University  
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**4) Opening Remarks by Kareem McKenzie, former football athlete,  
Pennsylvania State University and current player for the NY Giants**

KAREEM MCKENZIE: Good morning. Can you hear me? Okay.

My role here is to give you an idea of what it means to grow up in an environment conducive to sports and being around different numbers of athletes, because in high school myself I competed in track and football.

In football, for me there was no need to use performance-enhancing drugs. I remember as a child growing up through, I guess it was junior high school, that all my friends were asking me, are you going out for football? I never gave it any thought myself, football was something that I really didn't aspire to do, I didn't dream of being in the NFL or anything of that nature. I loved school for what it was. Getting the education. And they said, well, you should try. So I went out and my coach talked to me, he said, well son, you know, at that time I was about maybe six foot, two hundred some odd pounds and he said, well, you know, one day you could play in the NFL. I said, well coach, how do I do that? You know, he said, well, you can go to college for free. When he said that, that piqued my attention, you know, and next thing you know I'm a tenth grader, 6-5, 285 pounds.

My senior year I was 6-6, 330 pounds. So size was never really a problem for me myself, because I could always naturally gain size, but today's athletes, I get a lot of questions from the younger kids who came up behind me that are now in college and they're saying, well, you know, what do you do to become a stronger athlete? I say, well, you have to work hard. You know, there's no easy shortcut to going out there and being a good, sound football player. You can be as big as you want, you can be as strong as you want but there are no, there are no clocks on the field, there are no weight benches, no squats. You have to be a smart athlete.

And what entails being a smart athlete? You have to know what you're going on the football field, you have to be prepared for it, you have to study it and most of all you have to be careful. And in that I'm sort of in a subtle way saying, don't be stupid, don't go ahead and put yourself in the danger of harming your body. You always hear coaches talking about there's a difference between being hurt and being injured. Being injured is, you can't go, you can't play, they hold you out. When you're hurt you can go along, even though it's just a little bruise and nick, something that doesn't keep you out of the game. Well, you're going to go ahead and injure yourself mortally if you use steroids. Steroids is not the answer to going ahead and being a good, sound football player.

So I get a lot of questions, general questions from when I do my community service, you know, what type of car do you drive, you know, how did you get that big, what do you eat? I eat regular food, I'm just like the average human being, I was just blessed with size and the ability to use my talents to choose a career that provides for me and my family. So a lot of this information that I'm reading today is new to myself because I never thought that it was that prevalent in high school sports.

I mean we had an individual when I was growing in South Jersey in track where a kid was phenomenal at the shot put, you know, but when he got to the college ranks in the NCAA he never went anywhere. You know, there was some rumors that he might be using steroids and there were some signs. We didn't know, we always thought, you know, it was gossip. But at the same time I look back now on those experiences and I say, well, where is he now as an individual? Where is that person at now that was a phenomenal athlete in high school? But now, nine years down the road he's nowhere to be seen, you know. Was it steroids? It could have been. Was it that he couldn't make it as a collegiate athlete? The academic part of it?

Because that's something that we always forget about I think when we talk about steroids and performance-enhancing drugs, is that fact that these kids want to go to the next level of their respective sport, whether it be baseball, football, hockey, soccer, whatever it is. These kids want to go ahead and be in the limelight and the only way they see doing that is by going ahead and attracting the attention of some of these Division 1-A coaches who want the strong athlete, the good athlete, the All-States, the All-Americans, they want these athletes who will go ahead and make their program better. Because when I went to college it was, well, who has the biggest weight room? Who has the most practice fields? None of that stuff, when I look back at it now, matters now because it doesn't matter how big your weight room is, how many fields you have to practice on, you can only use one field at a time, you can only go ahead and bench, you know, one bench at a time, one squat.

It doesn't matter how big and the grandeur of it all. It's how hard you work within the environment that you have. And nothing made me realize that more than when I came to the NFL and looked at the different that they have throughout the NFL itself, thirty-two teams and they're all on a different level. There's no such thing as, well, we have the biggest weight room or we have the best equipment staff. It's all about what you were given and how you deal with it. And nothing says that more than looking at these past five years of different NFL Super Bowl Champions. Look at the New England Patriots, look at the Baltimore—who was it, the Baltimore Ravens—I'm going back a little bit far here because I work with the NFL a little bit, but the Baltimore Ravens years ago, you know, and look at Tampa Bay who've done a phenomenal job of going ahead, John Gruden going down there and winning a Super Bowl Championship. And from what I've been told they have the absolute worst facilities in the NFL. But kids don't understand that, they don't see that. All they see is Sundays, going out there, playing football, being in the limelight and being that Jevon Kearse, that Julius Peppers, Michael Strahan. They identify with the stars of the sports, they don't understand and recognize the hard work it takes to get out there on the field every Sunday and perform day in and day out.

So I think that if we go ahead and try to give these young athletes who are in high school, junior high school, an understanding of what it takes to be successful as an athlete, as a community citizen, a community minded person, they're going to better understand, I'm sorry, what it takes to be a good individual first and foremost. Because no one tells these students at the forefront that the average NFL career is only 3.3 years long. No one says that every Tuesday, your day off, they bring in anybody and everybody to take your position. They don't understand what it is in and out to be a professional athlete. So I think that's where we want to start also, we're trying to get these kids to understand that performance-enhancing drugs don't, they're not the answer, plain and simple.

Thank you very much.