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Joseph Vincent “Jay” Paterno

Eulogy Address at the Public Memorial for Jay Paterno



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Thank you very much. As you know, my name is Jay Paterno, but what I'm proudest of is when you look at my driver's license. It says: "Joseph Vincent Paterno, Jr." -- and I am so proud to have that name.

On behalf of my mother, Sue Paterno, and my entire family, we want to thank all of you for coming to honor our father, support our family, support the football family, and the Penn State community. We thank everyone -- for the prayers, the notes, support, vigils, and outpouring of emotion. We thank the staff and doctors at Mount Nittany Medical Center for the care and support of our father through these times. It has reinforced our belief in the generosity of the human spirit in the midst of challenging times in our family life.

The ancient Greek, Sophocles, once said, "One must wait until the evening to truly see how magnificent the day has been." My father, Joseph Vincent Paterno, never wanted to look back, to be seated in the evening reflecting on the day passed. Once something was done, it was on to the next challenge. Well, dad, you have no choice. The evening has arrived, and whether you like it or not, there are many here that have and will continue to reflect on the magnificent daylight of your life.

Born in Brooklyn to Angelo and Florence Paterno, many of you know the well-versed details of his life. What you may not know is his father instilled in him the ideals and values of inclusion and openness. Angelo Paterno worked [all] his life to increase dialogue between people of different faiths, different races, and his oldest son, Joe Paterno, made those values his core values.



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My father used his compassion and cleverness to take a stand in college. When one member of his fraternity kept putting a black ball in a secret ballot to deny entrance to a Jewish student, it was Joe that hatched a plan to get him in. On the next ballot, Joe stood up and proclaimed that he had put the black ball in, and he had changed his mind, thereby gaining admittance for that Jewish student when the black balling student would not own up to it. He took a stand.

When kids at school would call him a "guinea" or a "wap," his mother reminded him that every knock is a boost. She gave him self-esteem and inner confidence that formed a philosophy of personal excellence.

Yesterday, while sitting around, my father's friend and author of *The Exorcist*, Bill Blatty, told me a Joe Paterno high school story I'd never heard. At Brooklyn Prep, Bill had entered a city-wide singing contest. Everyone in the place thought he'd won with the exception of the two judges. A day later, a still-sullen Bill Blatty ran into Joe coming out of a little corner store near Brooklyn Prep. Joe said in his Brooklynese accent, [he] said, "Hey why ya down? Do you believe that you won?" "Yes," Bill replied. "That's all you need," Joe said. In high school he already possessed a strong inner confidence and strength, the belief in excellence over success -- excellence defined internally, success externally. It is best summed up by a quote by John Adams. Late in his life, Adams wrote, "No matter how high or low my estimation in the eyes of the world, my conscience is clear."

Joe Paterno left this world with a clear conscience.

He lived his large life nobly, never blindly chasing success defined by the world's ever-changing values. His values and goals remained as rock across the decades. He never sought celebrity. Here was a man for whom fame was accidental. But fame and power never touched his soul. In the end, he takes integrity with him forever.

He did realize his position in the world enabled him to make an impact, as he promised his father, Angelo, he would do. Angelo Paterno had hoped one time that his son would go to law school and rise up the ranks in politics or the law. At Penn State Joe Paterno would find a way to deliver on his promise to make an impact. And he delivered in a way that would roar out of our Valley and across the world on Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday morning, as thousands of people came to pay respects to my father became evident. They came from towns like St. Mary's, Altoona, Lock Haven, but the accents also came from Pittsburgh, Philly, New England, Brooklyn.

It didn't end there. The diversity was stunning. A white female student from California told me the same thing that a young black student told me from Louisiana: "You're father is the reason I came to Penn State." More accents came from around the world. People from five continents spoke to my brother and I -- North and South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa.



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Was this the result of a life of just coaching football?

Stories were shared at the viewing. There was a veteran from Bellefonte, wounded in Iraq. He recalled a Joe Paterno phone call to him in Bethesda while he was still recovering. There was a mother of Jeremy Herbstritt, a local young man killed while taking heroic action in the Virginia Tech massacre. She wanted to, once again, thank my father and our family for reaching out to them in their hour of greatest sadness. There was a former player who took a leave of absence to care for a five-year-old son with terminal brain cancer. He and his wife started getting money through his church from an anonymous donor. Only an accident by a church secretary revealed to him that Joe Paterno was his anonymous monthly benefactor. There were tender moments with an endless line of people. We shed tears together, hugged each other, and drew strength from each other. All hoped we could continue to conjure some of this strength, his indomitable will.

Joe Paterno indeed had an indomitable will, with one exception: when his will ran counter to that of his wife, and my mother, Sue Paterno. Once, while listening to the U2 song "Sometimes You Can't Make It On Your Own," I heard a beautiful lyric. It said, "You're the reason why the opera is in me." I shared that lyric with my dad. He smile with that same smile you've seen in that picture. He said, "That's your mother for me. That's your mother for me." Opera, you see, was an analogy he got. Years ago my father would work late into the summer evening hours and the sound of opera would gently drift through the night air over our rooms. My mother quite simply was *the* reason the opera was in my father's life. Joe Paterno strode the world with a confidence that he had found, met, and married the woman of his dreams.

Once, in college, I received unsolicited dating advice from my father. Like most 21-year-olds I thought I had all the answers. I said, "Dad, you haven't been on a date in like 30 years -- what do you know?" He responded with that twinkle in his eye when he knows he's right and he said, "Hey, I married your mother, didn't I?" You cannot argue with that. For my dad, he never doubted my mother. My mother had it all -- and continues to have it all. He could do his job, and we could share him with Penn State because he knew my mother was in complete command on the home front.

Ruskin once wrote: "When love meets skill, expect a masterpiece." The impact of love and skills collision as husband and wife, as mother and father, in all the pursuits of their life created a masterpiece you see before you today. Their artistry of love and skill became a driving force on this campus, benefitting all aspects of this university. They donated their own money and solicited donations of millions of dollars to benefit the whole university -- from buildings, to scholarships, to endowments.

When I started my coaching career at the University of Virginia, I noticed on that campus buildings with all kinds of symbols painted on them -- 7s, and Zs, and all these things.



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And I was told that these secret society symbols were painted on every building that those societies had helped to build. If we paint Joe and Sue Paterno on every building they helped to raise money for at Penn State, we'll need a lot of paint.

Both of their roles were known to so many people around the world and outside of Penn State. On Monday, when the President of the United States called to offer his condolences, he said, "Mrs. Paterno, it is well known what you and your husband did to help build a great institution." "We plan to keep on going," my mother said. "I wouldn't expect anything less," the President said. You get the picture. You all get the picture and you realize that, as Angelo Paterno wanted it, an impact has been made. And that impact has a lasting legacy, a legacy beyond accolades and buildings and endowments. It is in the people he reached, the people he taught.

Right now, I'd like for all the current and former football student-athletes to stand for a moment, please. Wherever you are in the arena, I want you to stand. Stay standing -- you're not sitting down yet. Your lives are his legacy. Your families, the people you reach are his legacy. The grand experiment, success with honor, was a ripple that has grown to a tsunami washing across the world. My father used to quote Tennessee Williams. He said, "I knew no one was immortal but I thought I was the exception. Well, dad, through this legacy, the legacy of so many you have touched, you are the exception. As Joe would say, "Sit down, now, sit down, sit down.

Joe's impact propelled all of us to success as fathers, husbands, mother, wives, on Main Street, on Wall Street. We've become doctors, coaches, lawyers, teachers, engineers, architects, and even Grammy-winning musicians like Mike Reid. By Joe's example, he has forwarded the torch of making an impact. He and his wife have invested their money and their time to causes from Special Olympics to Dance Marathon, Penn State's Campus Catholic Ministry.

That example has produced student-athlete graduates like Bill Spoor. He and his wife now spend their time away from his job at Goldman Sachs building schools in Uganda -- all at his own expense. He's brought people to the United States to attend college. They return home to be an example to others back home and make an impact. The examples of philanthropy at Penn State are all around. From the football team's Live for Life, to Dance Marathon, to Special Olympics, and so many more, Penn State students each year raise millions of dollars to help others and to forward the idea of making an impact.

As we prepare to leave here today, we must continue to celebrate the life of Joe Paterno. Among the things he accomplished in his life, it was the games he won that counted the least. It was as a son to his parents, a husband to his wife, a father to his children, an uncle, a brother-in-law, and what often seemed to be his crowning achievement in his life, as a grandfather to 17 grandchildren.



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But it went beyond that. He became a father, a coach, a mentor to countless others. Young men came from around this country -- from different races, different creeds, socioeconomic backgrounds -- and came to play football for him, but also to learn about life.

His impact reached men who worked for him, to Penn State students, to people he never met. One mourner told me Wednesday, he said, "You know your family is not very good at math." He said, "Your father has millions of children and grandchildren." His impact reached not only the young men he coached --

The players that came here to Penn State, came here because here was Martin Luther King's dream. He was a kid place where black kids and white kids could hold hands in a huddle, where we would all be given a chance -- an equal chance -- where they would be judged by the content of their character, not by the color of their skin, nor the way in which they prayed to their God. Bound by a common cause our differences would melt away. Whether it was the Middle East or Northern Ireland or Sudan, when the world would get crazy Joe would say to me, "If we could just get them all in a locker room before a game, and get them in a huddle to hold hands for a common cause."

At Penn State, our plain blue and white uniforms, white helmets, black shoes, and nameless school jerseys spoke volumes about his philosophy of sport and life -- the simplistic beauty of the basics, core values of honesty, loyalty, integrity, family and commitment to personal excellence.

Perhaps his truest moment, his living testimony to all that he stood for, came in the last months of his life. Faced with obstacles and changes that would have left a lesser man bitter, he showed his truest spirit and his truest self. Despite all that had happened to him, he never wavered in his belief, in his dream of Penn State. He told me he wanted to use his remaining time on earth to see Penn State continue to thrive. He never spoke ill and never wanted anyone to feel badly for him. On his 8th birthday, with all his children, their spouses, his grandchildren around him, he stressed how blessed his life had been. He saw the truest gifts of his life. He had his family, and a very meaningful book of letters from former players in front of him.

But time waits for no man. When my father was first diagnosed, I found time to see him every day. The day before he broke his pelvis, we walked through Sunset Park behind our house. He was tired and it was cold, but he wanted to go on a little farther. The sun was out, and as we talked and walked I watched our shadows as they moved with us across the grass and the twigs and some remaining leaves. I couldn't help but notice the similarity in gait, in posture, and in stride. I knew the challenge it would be to walk a path in life like his -- to do and expect more from life than just taking care of one's self; to be an example to my children, to teach them about the way my father and his father had lived their lives.



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It was the last night and early morning of my father's life. I got one final lesson from him. Sitting there watching him sleep, I started to think about him in ways I hadn't thought about in years. I thought about him helping me fly a kite in Cape Cod, playing "Monster" with us, jumping in the waves of the Jersey Shore. I thought about him in the audience, as I sang as the Admiral Joseph Porter in the elementary school production of the *H.M.S. Pinafore*. Memories flooded back of even the smallest moments of my childhood.

Early Sunday morning, which was to be our last together, I was seeing the father and son relationship from the eyes of my children and realized what I had to do to -- for my children as their father. I heard the long ago, early morning hum of the film projector as I remembered playing with my cars on the floor of his den. Here I was, in an early morning 36 to 37 years later, in a room alone with him once more. He had no more advice to give. But all I wanted was for one more word from him, one more lesson, just to hear his voice.

He has given so much to my family, our university, our football program, our country, and the world. To ask for more here in the last hours of his life would have been selfish on my part. Yet, here with saying a word, his presence alone gave me one last lesson: The smallest acts of a father, a coach, a mentor can echo across decades and retain meaning for a man who would be a father to his own children. It was a tennis great and humanitarian Arthur Ashe who once said when asked about his daughter, and asked about being a father -- he said: "I love my wife, but I am crazy about my daughter." I know that my father was crazy about his children, and indeed, all the children he has coached or reached over the years.

Over the past 17 years, I've stood in a locker room with him after games hundreds of times. Into those moments walked dozens of Saturday gladiators, the smell of sweat in the air, the grass and blood stains on the uniform, the scratches on the plain helmets; and in the air, the sorrow if we've lost, and under Joe Paterno, far more often, the joy of a win. Joe Paterno would offer some words about the game we just played, most often reminding that you're never as good as you think you are when you win and you're never as bad as you were when you think you were when you lost. All those guys who played from him can still hear that.

For 45 years he led this program. He always ended his post-game remarks with the same thing. He's say, "Let's thank the good Lord." And we would kneel down, hold hands, and say that *Lord's Prayer*. One time, just out of curiosity, I said, "Dad, why? Why that prayer?" He said, "The words, Jay, the words": "Our Father," "give *us* this day," "*our* daily bread," "forgive *us*...as we forgive." "We," "us," -- every pronoun is plural, "we" and "us." There is no "I" or "me."

Then it clicked. Here in the last act after every football game we play is a reminder from Joe that it was never about him. It was we and us, unselfish to the core. The current and former players in this room know that, and they know that scene. They've had those moments.

But this afternoon I want us all that have that moment.



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I ask that if you are able to stand up. Hold the hands of the person next to you and step into that locker room and feel the bonds of Penn State.

Let's say one last "Our Father" as a team for Joe Paterno:

*Our Father, who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth,
As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass
against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power,
and the glory,
For ever and ever.*

Amen.

Thank you.

To conclude, I want to share one more thing with you. On Sunday morning I told my father when I was alone in the room with him, I said, "You know, dad, you fulfilled your father's command to make an impact. You really have." And a half hour later or so when it became clear that his time on earth was rapidly coming to a close -- and my last words to my father -- I kissed him and I whispered into his ear so that only he could hear, "Dad, you won. You did all that you could do. You've done enough. We all love you. You won. You can go home now."

Thank you, very much.