

## CLASS DAY REMARKS

Yale University  
New Haven, CT  
May 21, 2017

[Introduced.]

Thank you... thank you. It appears we have some Cub fans here today. Alright, let's get right to it then: how many of you are Cub fans? [Mild applause.] How many are Red Sox fans? [More applause.] And how many are Yankee fans? [Robust applause.] I see. Yankee fans, the exits are located on either side toward the back... you can just head right out Phelps Gate!

President Salovey, Heads of College, College Deans, Members of the Faculty and Staff, good afternoon.

Members of the Class Council, Class Day Chairs Joana Andoh and Larry Milstein, Class Secretary Tommy Rosenkranz, Class Treasurer Mimi Pham, and the entire Yale Class of 2017, greetings and congratulations! I am honored to be with you today to help you celebrate, and I would like to thank Joana and Larry for inviting me on your behalf as well as for that kind introduction.

Your class has been witness to and a participant in a period of historic change at Yale: the inauguration of a new President; the creation of two new residential colleges; the renaming of a third; and, most savory of all, the introduction of Hanoi Fried Cape Shark.

I would like to recognize some of the members of your class who had special accomplishments this year:

- the Yale baseball team, for just this week winning the Ivy League and earning its first NCAA tournament berth since 1994 ... congratulations;
- the Yale football team for beating Harvard for the first time in 10 years... well done, Bulldogs;
- and Saybrook for an unprecedented commitment to the Saybrook Strip. Good job, Saybrook! I seem to remember back in my day we at least kept our underwear on and didn't get hauled away by the Harvard police, but congratulations on taking it to the next level! That is what we call progress!

I would also like to thank some others who are here today in support:

- First, my family, including my dad, Leslie, Class of '60, and my sister, Anya, Class of '92. I know, despite your faith in me, you are mildly surprised that I am standing up here today as Class Day Speaker;
- Next, my friends and classmates at Yale, with whom I discovered the great institutions of higher education – Toad's Place and Rudy's – and wasted many brain cells in the pursuit of the knowledge hidden there. I know you are as shocked as I am about this incredible honor here today.
- And finally, a nod to my professors and especially my terrific graduate student teaching assistants. Thank you for all your invaluable tutelage. I know you were somewhat bemused

that I made it to my own Class Day, so I am sure you are downright horrified that I am the one speaking here today!

I remember my years at Yale fondly, and, as you'll find out, a Yale degree is something that stays with you the rest of your life. Back in 2002, when I was 28 years old, I stumbled into being named General Manager of the Boston Red Sox. Days after I was hired, my boss, Larry Lucchino, was visiting his old baseball colleague, President George W Bush, Class of '68, in the White House. President Bush asked: "What are you doing naming a 28-year-old kid as your general manager? That's an absurd risk; he's far too young." Lucchino replied: "But, Mr. President, you don't understand, he's a Yale Man," -- to which the President replied: "Sttrriike Two!"

Like the former President, I didn't do anything too serious with my career; I just worked in baseball. Yes, American's National Pastime, but also, largely, just part of the bread and circuses of society, entertaining and distracting us while others like my twin brother Paul, a social worker, do the real work of holding our communities together. But there are certainly times when baseball is much more than bread and circus, times when baseball resonates deeply and meaningfully with many, many people, and times when a game that is built around overcoming failure can teach us all a few important lessons.

So, Class of 2017, if you'll indulge me, I'm going to tell you just one baseball story. It's a bit long, but don't worry you'll like the ending... unless you happen to be from Cleveland, in which case I am truly sorry! The story is about a very important game -- Game Seven of last year's World Series -- but has little to do with the actual outcome of the game.

For those who don't follow baseball: a little background. I work for the Chicago Cubs, a team with a following so loyal and adoring and a history so forlorn that we were known nationwide as the Loveable Losers. As of last fall, the Cubs had not won the World Series since 1908. Think about that. 1908. That's the Teddy Roosevelt administration. The Ottoman Empire was still around. That's two World Wars ago. (Well, I haven't checked the news since breakfast... let me look at my phone... oh, good, yes, still only two World Wars ago!) It was a 108-year drought, the longest in the history of professional sports. As the late Cubs broadcasting legend Jack Brickhouse said: "Hey, anybody can have a bad century."

I joined the Cubs after the 2011 season amid an inordinate and uncomfortable amount of media attention. The Chicago Sun-Times, I remember, ran a full-page, front-page photo-shop of me walking on water across Lake Michigan, as if by showing up I was going to miraculously fix the team's fortunes. Imagine their disappointment, then, when I announced a long-term rebuilding plan focused on acquiring young players and winning in five years. One season and 101 losses later, the same paper ran the identical picture on the front page, but this time the only part of me above water was the tip of my nose!

One day in the early years, after a particularly humiliating double-digit loss at Wrigley, I was walking home amongst the fans in a bit of a foul mood and I remember I kept my head down, trying not to get recognized. A very charming elderly woman spotted me and came over to ask a question. "I appreciate what you are trying to do, young man, I really do. I understand why you are bringing in so many young players, but, tell me: exactly when are you planning on winning a World Series? I'm not sure how much time I have left."

I was a little taken aback and all I could think of to say as I put my head back down to walk away was: "Ma'am, I hope you take your vitamins!" (That was five years ago. If it happened today I guess I would say: "Ma'am, I hope you don't have any preexisting conditions!")

After three years of arduous rebuilding, we had a nucleus of young players we believed in who were ready to break into the majors together. Many of these players were 21- and 22-years-old: your peers, your generation. Typically, it takes young players years to adjust to life in the big leagues and to start performing up to their capabilities. Most of the blame for this rests on these ridiculous old baseball norms that say young players are to be seen and not heard. That young players must follow and not lead. That young players must adhere to the established codes -- from the dress code that requires them to wear suits and ties to the code that says major league players can't get too excited on the field or look like they are having too much fun.

Thankfully, we hired a manager in Joe Maddon who agreed it was time to turn these conventions on their heads. We asked our young players to be themselves, to show their personalities, to have fun, to be daring, to be bold. The dress code was changed from suit and tie to: "If you think you look hot, wear it!" Unburdened, and empowered, our young team flourished last season, winning 103 games, the most in baseball, and reached our first World Series since 1945. After fighting back from a three-games-to-one deficit against the Cleveland Indians, we faced a decisive Game Seven in Cleveland.

I watched Game Seven from the stands with my colleagues, my wife Marie, and my oldest son Jack, who was then eight years old. Jack, a big baseball fan and the math whiz of the family, kept me updated on the Cubs' win probability throughout the game. As we enjoyed a two-run lead after five innings, he tapped me on the leg: "Dad, we have a 67% chance of winning the World Series." "I know, buddy. It's going well. But, remember, it's baseball. Lots of things can happen." Later, we had a three-run lead with just four outs to go in the game, nobody on base, and the bottom of the Indians order coming up. Tens of millions of Cubs fans nationwide, counting down the outs, put their arms around loved ones – or called them – to keep them close for the big moment ahead.

Jack put his arm around me: "Dad, we have a 97% chance of winning the World Series!"

"I know, buddy, I know." I said. "It's so great. One batter at time, though. We still need four more outs. Don't want to look too far ahead."

"But, Dad, first time in 108 years!"

Then, out of nowhere, as storm clouds suddenly moved into the area: an infield single, a double, an errant fastball, a fateful swing, an impossible home run.... and a tie game.

Indians fans erupted, rocking the stadium on its foundation with ear-splitting cheers. Cubs fans and I slumped in our seats, heads in hands. I felt another tap on my leg. "Dad, we definitely have less than a 50% chance of winning the World Series now." I couldn't think of anything wise to say, so I just sat up in my seat, stared stoically out at the field, put one arm around my son, and with the other I patted his leg as reassuringly as I could.

Minutes later, the skies opened up and rain halted the action. It was just enough of a pause to ponder the magnitude of the situation. Extra innings in Game Seven of the World Series. An

entire season, down to this one moment. A five-year plan, down to this moment. 108 years of patience and unrequited love from our fans, down to this moment.

Still in a bit of a daze, I cut through our clubhouse toward a meeting about the weather. Turning a corner, I saw, through the window of the weight room door, the backs of our players' blue jerseys, shoulder to shoulder and packed tightly, all 25 guys squeezed into a space designed for half that many. It was an unusual sight. We hardly ever had meetings and never during a game. I inched closer to the door and saw Aroldis Chapman, the pitcher who had surrendered the tying home run, in tears. I lingered just long enough to hear a few sentences.

"We would not even be here without you," catcher David Ross said as he embraced Chapman. "We are going to win this for you. We are going to win this for each other."

Outfielder Jason Heyward walked to the middle of the room: "We are the best team in baseball" he said. "We've leaned on each other all year. We've still got this. This is only going to make it sweeter."

And then first baseman Anthony Rizzo: "Nobody can take this away from us. We have each other."

Kyle Schwarber stood up with a bat in his hands: "We win this right here!"

I turned away, a big smile on my face, and headed to the weather meeting.

Ten minutes later, the rain cleared. Schwarber led off with a single, Ben Zobrist doubled just past the reach of the third baseman, and we took the lead. In the bottom of the 10th, with the tying run on base and the winning run at the plate, at 12:47 a.m., Kris Bryant fielded a slow roller with a gigantic smile on his face and threw to Rizzo for the final out. We had won the World Series. My wife, Jack and I embraced in celebration – equal parts ecstasy and relief. I noticed Jack's mouth agape; the young mathematician was shocked and overjoyed that we had for once beaten the odds.

Later that morning, back in Chicago, the team bus passed a cemetery on the drive from O'Hare to Wrigley. We saw countless Cubs hats and pennants already draped lovingly over tombstones for family members who did not quite live to see the moment. The next day, five million triumphant Chicagoans from every corner of the immense city gathered downtown for a victory parade. The sea of blue was a beautiful sight; Chicago, fractious and endangered, was united in the aftermath of the championship.

After all the champagne had dried and we finally got a good night's sleep, I found myself returning to a simple question: what should I tell Jack and his younger brother, Drew, about this historic achievement; what is it, exactly, that I want them to hold on to?

I thought immediately of the players' meeting during the rain delay, and how connected they were with each other, how invested they were in each other's fates, how they turned each other's tears into determination. During rain delays players typically come in off the field and head to their own lockers, sit there by themselves, change their wet jerseys, check their phones, think about what has gone right and wrong during the game, and become engrossed in their own worlds. That would have been disastrous for our team during Game Seven -- 25 players

sitting alone at their lockers, lamenting the bad breaks, assigning blame, wallowing, wondering. Instead, they had the instinct to come together.

Actually, it was not an instinct; it was a choice.

One day I will tell Jack and Drew that some players -- and some of us -- go through our careers with our heads down, focused on our craft and our tasks, keeping to ourselves, worrying about our numbers or our grades, pursuing the next objective goal, building our resumes, protecting our individual interests. Other players -- and others amongst us -- go through our careers with our heads up, as real parts of a team, alert and aware of others, embracing difference, employing empathy, genuinely connecting, putting collective interests ahead of our own. It is a choice.

The former approach, keeping our heads down, seems safer and more efficient, and I guess sometimes it may be. The latter, connecting, keeping our heads up, allows us to lead, and, every now and then, to be part of something bigger than ourselves, and, therefore, to truly triumph. I know, I will tell them, because I have tried it both ways.

And I will tell Jack and Drew that we all have our rain delay moments. There will be times when everything you have been wanting, everything you have worked for, everything you have earned, everything you feel you deserve is snatched away in what seems like a personal and unfair blow. This, I will tell them, is called life. But when these moments happen, and they will, will you be alone at your locker with your head down, lamenting, divvying up blame; or will you be shoulder to shoulder with your teammates, connected, with your heads up, giving and receiving support?

And I will tell them not to wait until the rain comes to make this choice, because that can be too late. We weren't winners that night in Cleveland because we ended up with one more run than the Indians. If Zobrist's ball were four inches farther off the line, it would have been a double play and we would have lost the game. That was randomness; like much of life, it was arbitrary. We were winners that night in Cleveland because when things went really, really wrong -- and then the rains came -- our players already knew each other so well that they could come together; they already trusted each other so much that they could open up and be vulnerable, and they were already so connected that they could lift one another up. We had already won. That's why I had that smile on my face as I walked away from the weight room door.

I learned later that the players' only meeting had been called by Heyward, a 27-year-old who was suffering through a terrible offensive season, by far the worst of his career. Most players who are having seasons that rough detach from the team and isolate themselves -- either to the disabled list or to the periphery of the clubhouse. But Heyward stayed at the center of everything: he never stopped being invested in his teammates, opened up to them about his own struggles, and bought them suites on the road for gatherings. The first to speak was Ross, the 38-year-old backup catcher in his final season who made a career out of being a wonderful teammate (and who is now in the finals of Dancing With The Stars. And you thought you were having a good year?) Rossy was always reaching out to befriend the loneliest players, organizing team dinners, breaking down the barriers that sometimes arise between players of different backgrounds in the clubhouse. The last to speak was Rizzo, the young team leader who all season long was reminding his teammates they were going to make history together, have a parade, and spend the rest of eternity linked with one another. Anthony, a survivor of

pediatric cancer, just celebrated the World Series by making a \$3.5 million gift to Chicago's Lurie Children's Hospital. Schwarber, who raced out of the meeting and right into the batter's box, had torn two ligaments in his knee in the third game of the season – a 12-to-15 month injury. Rather than disappearing to a rehab facility, Schwarber, just 23, stayed connected with his team, getting his rehab work done early so nobody would have to see him in that state, and then functioning as an extra coach for his teammates the rest of the day. He kept telling his teammates he was going to find a way to help them win. Shocking the doctors and everyone else, Schwarber returned in just six months, right in time for the World Series. He hit over .400, including the single to start the deciding rally in Game Seven.

Early in my career, I used to think of players as assets, statistics on a spreadsheet I could use to project future performance and measure precisely how much they would impact our team on the field. I used to think of teams as portfolios, diversified collections of player assets paid to produce up to their projections to ensure the organization's success. My head had been down. That narrow approach worked for a while, but it certainly had its limits. I grew and my team-building philosophy grew as well. The truth – as our team proved in Cleveland -- is that a player's character matters. The heartbeat matters. Fears and aspirations matter. The player's impact on others matters. The tone he sets matters. The willingness to connect matters. Breaking down cliques and overcoming stereotypes in the clubhouse matters. Who you are, how you live among others -- that all matters. The youngest team in World Series history with six starters under the age of 25; they helped me get my head up.

That is why, at the important moments in their lives, I'm going to keep telling my sons about the 2016 Cubs and that rain delay. And I'll remind them – when they are graduating college or starting a new job, heading off to grad school or beginning a new life somewhere foreign – that they have a choice.

So, to the Class of 2017, as someone who has already been uplifted by members of your generation, I am thankful and in awe of what you all can accomplish when given the space to be free, to let your personalities out, and to figure it out. I am truly inspired by the traits that distinguish your generation -- your diversity, your boldness, your optimism, your tolerance, your treatment of each other based on substance rather than on the labels that used to divide us.

I am so excited to see what lies ahead for you all. While there will undoubtedly be times here and there when you have to suck it up, follow the code, and put on that suit and tie, I urge you to remember that if you think you look hot, wear it! And please remember that even though so much can be quantified these days, the most important things cannot be. And, finally, when things go really, really wrong -- and then when it rains on top of everything else -- I ask you to choose to keep your heads up and come together, to connect, and to rally around one another, especially those who need it the most. It is likely to uplift you all.

Thank you, and congratulations.