INFORMATIVE SPEECH

FOR

TOM CONTRERAS

Revised

“If you want to surf, move to Hawaii. If you like to shop, move to New York. If you like acting and Hollywood, move to California. But if you like college football, move to Texas.” Those words were spoken by professional football player and University of Texas graduate and collegiate football star Ricky Williams. From where I stand, he has an excellent point, and he should know. There are many plusses we can cite that prove that collegiate sports are a positive and invaluable part of college life on so many levels. Alana Patrick wrote a piece recently in Huffington Post College titled, “The Benefits of Playing Sports in College.” She lists the following bonuses that collegiate sports offer: Participation allows one to make connections-it’s a great way to meet people. It supports collegians in becoming better students. Research has actually shown that playing a sport aids in reducing stress, enforces a feeling of renewed energy, and teaches those involved time management. In addition participants have the opportunity to fine-tune their competitive nature as well as their managerial and leadership skills. It’s a fantastic way to keep in shape. It allows people to explore and discover deeper passions and interests and participation in sports also informs the “end game.” Involvement in collegiate activities on a resume shows a potential employer that the candidate is literally “willing to play.” When focusing on the importance of college football in particular, The University of Texas provides an excellent example of just how sports can make a university a viable financial entity in this day and age.

In an article for Forbes.com, entitled, “College Football’s Most Valuable Teams 2013: Texas Longhorns Can’t Be Stopped,” writer Chris Smith tells us, “… The Longhorns are now worth 139 million dollars, almost 20% more than any other team in the country.” The article goes on to inform us that the University of Texas leads all schools in merchandise sales, school specific TV deals, and was the first team to make more than 100 million dollars in revenue which, at the time the article was written meant they sustained that record for two years. Whether that revenue comes from ticket sales, contributions, merchandise or NCAA distributions, it all adds up to a well-funded school where the entire student body has the potential to benefit. Let’s face it, higher education is a big business and the University of Texas has proven its ability to strategize and find success.

Legend has it, according to the University of Texas website, that in November 1893, the football team was basically started on a “dare.” The Dallas Football Club, known as the “Football Champions of Texas” who wanted to see how UT’s fledgling club would handle the “Big Boys”, threw that gauntlet down. The Longhorns won 18-16 and went on to beat Dallas again and San Antonio twice. The bar had been set and proud Longhorns have sustained the standard ever since. As we look back on the history of the University of Texas Longhorns, we can see that the team consistently honors its heritage. The spirit and talent of its players has always been encouraged and nurtured and as a result, the Longhorns have an impressive record. In recent college football history, the team, which competes in the NCAA Division 1 Football Bowl Subdivision as a member of the Big 12 Conference, has quite an impressive record. As of the end of the 2013 season, Texas’ all-time record with 875-339-33 distinguishes the team as having the second most wins in NCAA Division 1 FBS history. They rank second in bowl game appearances, fourth in bowl game victories, and they have the most Southwest Conference championships. It is to the credit of the team and the school that the Longhorns demonstrate such consistent and spirited results. Their enthusiasm provides pride for the student body and as a result, the students strive to make sure their football team represents them admirably.

Every college team worth its salt has a symbol to unify the team and its followers and The Longhorns are no exception. Enter Bevo, the Texas Longhorns mascot. In 1916, as the tradition of Thanksgiving football between UT and Texas A+M gained traction, some graduates had the idea to acquire a real longhorn as a living mascot for the school. We learn on the UT website History Corner that there was specific symbolism in choosing a live mascot. “As the great longhorn was free to roam the wilderness of Texas, so must the University be free to roam the world of thought, unhampered and unafraid. The name Bevo is believed to be a modification of “Beef-o” and whatever it’s roots might be, and even though the original longhorn might have had a little “attitude problem” (he charged the photographer and crowd upon his debut), the longhorn tradition has endured proudly for the past century and will continue to inspire and encourage, and hopefully remain in his pen. According to the Utexas.com website, the school is now represented by Bevo XIV, the fourteenth reincarnation, and it seems that this “Dalai Lama” of the mascot world is probably the most distinguished one to inherit the title. He has attended two presidential inaugurations; he’s been as far as Pasadena where he led the team to victory over Michigan in the Rose Bowl-and that was just in his first year on the job! In addition, he also counts Academy Award winner Matthew McConaughey as a “personal friend,” and is considered “the winningest descendant “ of the mascot yet with over 100 wins on his watch. Bevo XIV’s horns span over six feet. As longhorns go, Bevo is “**Da Bull**.” (**Wait for the laugh**).

College sports, and in particular football, offer unimaginable benefits to students, coaches and teachers alike. The playing field is literally leveled by sportsmanship, teamwork, and focus on a communal “goal.” The University of Texas is just one obvious example of the power of the sports community and there are others as well. On a much smaller level, the New York Times highlights the work of Sister Lisa Maurer, a Benedictine nun who is one of the coaches of the team at the College of St. Scholastica in Minnesota. The article, “Living an Upright Life, as a Nun and a Coach,” opens our eyes to the miracles that can happen with a healthy dose of team spirit. This tiny female is able to rally her team and inspire them and acknowledges that her coaching “just adds another layer of living our mission and living our values.” When thought of in that light, it’s no wonder that college sports, and in this case football, have the ability to unite, rally and support entire educational institutions. Thank you all!.