**AWARDS SPEECH**

**FOR**

**DUKE WHELAN**

Hello everyone... and to all of you present tonight.... family and friends, colleagues, fellow inductees, distinguished guests, **ALL** of you.... lacrosse is a group sport. It’s .... **currently** not possible to play the game alone... unless I **missed something**, and someone has discovered a very fast, very agile, switch hitting multitasker... (**Wait for the laugh**).... but I don’t think so.... at least not yet. So until as the time comes for that wizard with a thousand arms and very quick reflexes, I want you to know that I share this recognition with **ALL** of you. Tonight, for me, marks possibly the greatest moment in my long association with the sport, and although it is an incredible honor to be recognized by the North Carolina Lacrosse Hall of Fame, I have always maintained the same mission with regard to my participation. When I got involved in lacrosse as a kid, it opened up an entire world for me. Back then, I learned about teamwork and what it means to be supported and to have someone’s back. I remember how it felt to be involved and how gratifying it felt to either win or to learn.... either way, we advance and we grow... sometimes, in the moment, it doesn’t feel that way, but as I look back, I can see that is was the defeats that inspired the greatest life lessons. As I advanced within the sport, and as I found myself growing into a position in which more coaching and leadership was involved, the experience of witnessing other, younger people find their strength, their confidence, and their connection to others was a fantastic motivator.... and each of those steps, from novice to player to mentor and to coach and advocate, have encouraged spirit and community, and that’s just about priceless.

As I receive this honor tonight, there are certain phrases that stay with me... “Paying it forward” and “Giving back” remind me every day why we do what we do.... we do it for the **kids**...so they will know that hard work and practice yield more than a simple win... we do it for those who mentored and coached **US**... even when it might not have seemed like **any** natural gifts would **ever** be revealed, and we do it for our **selves**, because through participation and promotion of this sport, the ends justify the means.... and in reality, there **IS** no end... we play to be a part of the adrenaline, the exertion, and the thrill of .... **de feet**... and **de aim**... and **de goal**... (**Wait for the laugh**).

While many people are not too familiar with the game of lacrosse, I am grateful for its popularity in this **crowd**. While I was thinking about this evening, and about the history and impact of lacrosse throughout civilization, I discovered that lacrosse is one of the **OLDEST sports in the world**.... which I thought was **weird** because I thought that **I was one of the oldest sports in the world**!! (**Wait for the laugh**). The Federation of International Lacrosse teaches us, “French Jesuit missionaries working in the St. Lawrence Valley in the **1630’s** were the first Europeans to see lacrosse being played by the Native American Indians.” History also claims that “lacrosse was often played to resolve conflicts, heal the sick, , and develop strong, virile men.” We can start a new slogan... “**Lacrosse, the SUPER game.... since 1636!**”

If you had told me, back then, that I would be receiving this honor tonight, I probably would have given you some major “side eye.” Not only because I didn’t do it for the praise.... I’m also not really from the “public speakers...” so **THANKS**, everyone!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). I just played the game, supported my teammates, did what I was supposed to do, and gave my all.... and the game kept giving back to me. I liked the fast pace and I can recall how, in high school, and college, I got excited as my coaches encouraged the spirited competition and sportsmanship. There are those who refer to lacrosse as “the fastest sport on two feet,” and with every practice and every game.... my feet got faster!!!

As I advanced in my experience and abilities, I took on bigger roles within the sport... I can’t say “organization,” because in the early days, Lacrosse wasn’t yet recognized as a sanctioned sport. As I began to realize the downside of not being organized and sanctioned, several of us dye hard “**lacrossolics**” saw the opportunity and we became pretty relentless. For all of the kids and participants that were becoming more and more involved in lacrosse as a team sport, we believed it deserved to be legitimized and recognized.... after all, I guess we can look back and say it only took **THREE-HUNDRED AND SIXTY SEVEN YEARS... no rush**!!! (**Wait for the laugh**).

Over the years, we’ve made suggestions, we did our research, and our hard work and intention paid off. Once lacrosse became a sanctioned sport by the North Carolina Athletic Association, and once the moving parts were coordinated and set into motion, the participants in our state... the most important moving part being our youth, were able to have a much more robust and complete experience of this engaging team sport.

It is also gratifying to work with US Lacrosse to see its popularity spread and take hold throughout the country. Let’s remember that although there are other great activities, and I’m not calling “foul” on any of them, lacrosse has a certain approachability... it keeps moving... it’s fast... it’s challenging, and kids get to run around... with a purpose.

Since the years as a sanctioned sport have accumulated, so have the innovations and improvements. We did what we did to make sure the participating kids have the best possible experience while playing. I’ll never forget one night, John Hayden, my very able friend and colleague who is also being inducted tonight, were in the stands at UNC Chapel Hill. We were watching the state championships, and the kids had to go across the street to get just a bottle of water!!! John voiced out loud that the kids deserve a better experience than that.... we’ve come a ways from John’s revelation that night and I look forward to even more advances in participation and recognition. Encouragement plays a tremendous and powerfully positive role in reinforcing confidence in our youth. We also believe we give the players something intangible but vital... and that’s a memory that they can carry with them to motivate themselves and those they will mentor. In my involvement with lacrosse over the years, I’ve seen kids go from ball boys and ball girls all the way to high school championships. We must be doing **SOMETHING** right!!

This entire evening is about acknowledgement and giving thanks. If I even made an attempt to thank **EVERYONE** on my list of acknowledgments, we’d be here **wayyyyyyy** past closing.... and remember.... I’m a **DOER**, **not** a public speaker!!! (**Wait for the laugh**) As I said earlier, lacrosse is a team sport, and through the years I have been blessed to have my comrades and cheering section encourage me through the rough spots while cheering me through the victories. To all of my fellow inductees, congratulations!!! I know as we accept these accolades, we will find renewed and refreshed energy to coordinate greater events and to mentor and encourage even more players to become the mentors and leaders of tomorrow.... and not just in lacrosse! To my mother, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ , who, at **EIGHTY NINE** years old is most definitely the **OG** of my cheerleading squad... Mom... it really is a **GIFT** to have you share this honor with me.... to my brother \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and my sisters, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, you too, were there on the vanguard of my cheering section (**If they weren’t, you can say**) ... or at least that’s how **I REMEMBER IT**!! (**and wait for the laugh**). To my wife, Sallie, definitely the “Mickey” (**Do you prefer ADRIENNE?**) to my “Rocky,” thank you for **ALWAYS** having my back, rubbing my back... and pushing my back out the door time and again as you encourage me to do what I love. To my sons, David and Michael, I hope that I have inspired you, first as kids, then as mentors, and if there are any complaints, tell your mother!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). Boys, it is now **YOUR** turn to get encouragement from your partners (**Name your sons’ girlfriend and fiancée)**, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ to motivate and inspire the next generations. (**Name your son who is coaching**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ , I cannot tell you how great it makes me feel when I hear of your own “adventures in coaching.” It’s actions like this that will keep the sport alive and growing for another **THREE HUNDRED AND SIXTY SEVEN YEARS**.... and counting!!!

Here’s to more cookie races, more encouraging, more advances, more sportsmanship, and lots more cheers for the great sport of lacrosse... Thank you all!!!