

12-11-1956

Dedication of Field House 1956

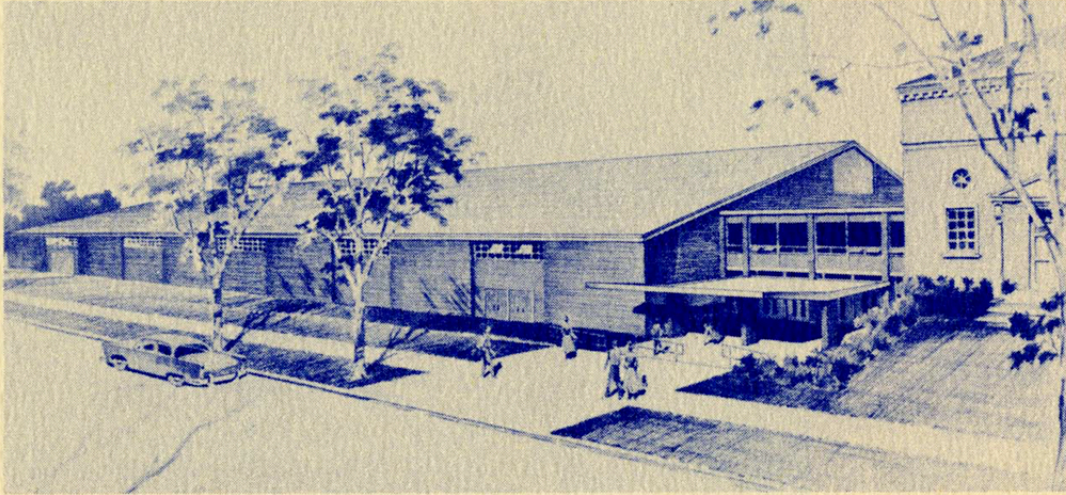
Bob Richards

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/archives_audio

Recommended Citation

Richards, Bob, "Dedication of Field House 1956" (1956). *Audio Recordings from the Macalester College Archives*. 4.
http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/archives_audio/4

This Media is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives Audio and Video Collections at DigitalCommons@Macalester College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Audio Recordings from the Macalester College Archives by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Macalester College. For more information, please contact scholarpub@macalester.edu.



DEDICATION PROGRAM

of the

Macalester College Field House

December 11, 1956

Audio Reel #104

Dedication of Field House 12/11/1956

Mr. MacGregor: We are highly honored tonight to have with us a man who made his reputation on the Champaign High School football team when they won the Illinois football championship. Then he spent two and a half years at Bridgewater College in Virginia where he was ordained a minister of the Church of the Brethren and went on to the University of Illinois to secure his master's degree in philosophy. For a while he was competing under the colors of the Chicago Illinois Athletic Club and now the Los Angeles Athletic Club. In 1951, the Amateur Athletic Union picked him as the outstanding amateur sportsman and he was the winner of its James E. Sullivan memorial trophy. He won the Olympic pole vault in 1952 and as we all know, he won it again in Australia. He has won the decathlon title, the national AAU decathlon title three times and participated in that event this year. His pole vault record is the world's record he made just two months ago—fifteen feet, five inches. That's pretty high. I once heard the definition of an athlete, he was the man who hired a small boy to cut the grass so he could go off and play golf for a little exercise. [laughter]

That doesn't apply to our speaker tonight. I guess he has worked and trained practically all his life and still does three hours a day at least. He is strictly as amateur an athlete can be and has turned down help from all kinds of promoters of athletic meets. His profession is as administer of the gospel in which capacity at which he served the church in Long Beach, California and was associated for three years with La Verne College and is now minister at large of the Church of the Brethren. Bob Richards, it was wonderful that you could get back from Australia in time and be our guest speaker tonight. The floor is yours. [Applause]

Bob Richards: Thank you very much. Thank you friends. [Applause] Thank you very, very much good friends of Macalester College. Thank you Mr. MacGregor. Frankly as I stand here before this audience this evening, I can't help but think of the old joke regarding the preacher who was to introduce another one and he didn't have the very finest of grammar, though he was a great spiritual giant. And he stood up and he said, "You know folks, we always introduce people in this congregation according to rank." He said [feigning accent], "First we introduce those with just a little bit of rank, and then those with just a little mo' rank." And he said shouting out, "Now he comes to the rankest of them all!" [Laughter]

Well as I stand here after wonderful remarks already, with cannons on the left of me and cannons on the right, Ph.Ds and outstanding preachers, believe me I feel like "da rankest" of them all.

But for better or for worse, Dr. Turck got a hold of me, asked me to come and what a thrill it has been to just be here. I don't know if I can fill the bill as a speaker or not, but in terms of enthusiasm for your new field house and your wonderful program here at this college, perhaps I can, I can exuberate a little bit some of the enthusiasm. I say again, I feel like the preacher who has to take the place of Dr. Phillips Brooks. I suppose you've all read it at some time or another at least something that Phillips Brooks wrote, that great spiritual tower who wrote "Oh Little Town of Bethlehem." They say about him that when he walked down the streets of Boston, regardless of how cold or wet or damp it was, even hardened newspaper writers would say, "When Phillip Brooks walked down the street, the sun shone." Well he was that kind of a man, but also physically he was a giant, weighing about two hundred and eighty pounds and about six feet five inches tall and when he died, they had the task literally of filling his pulpit because they

had constructed for him a mammoth pulpit upon which he could lean that frame of his and preach his tremendous messages. Well, they couldn't find anyone and they finally heard of a great speaker in Chicago and they asked him to come out. And it turned out that he happened to be five feet two inches tall and he weighed a hundred and thirty-one pounds dripping wet. And when he went into the pulpit he could barely be seen standing on tiptoe peering out above the top of this monstrous pulpit. And his theme for the morning for his trial sermon happened to be, "Be not afraid, it is I." [Laughter]

Well, good friends, as I am in this pulpit, surrounded not only by those present tonight but thinking of a historic past in which Macalester has had such outstanding men as Glenn Clark, whom I read avidly, and one of my—I'd like to call him a friend—Dr. Louie Evans when I think of all you've had and then you come to me, I think, "In smallness, be not afraid it is I." My only claim to fame friends is that I'm a pole vaulting preacher, or as some people have called me, "The High-Flying Parson," or as others in Scotland have called me "The Jumpin' Padre." I made a trip, a goodwill tour for the State Department a couple of years ago, and in India they call me "The Ricocheting Reverend." I don't know... [Laughter]

Where in the world they got the phraseology, but it's interesting to note all the humorous to note all the comments they make about a preacher in sport. I've also been called "the one who loves the hymn 'Near My God to Thee' and we are climbing Jacob's ladder in all..." [Laughter]

Kinds of things. But I think the funniest one of all is the one coined by a writer in Cleveland when he said I was the only preacher he knew of trying to get to heaven on his own strength.

[Laughter]

Well, be that as it may friends, I've had some wonderful, thrilling experiences in sport. As a matter of fact, I owe a debt of gratitude to sport that I can never repay, and I'd like to suggest to you tonight in the brief time allotted me, and incidentally I can't think of anything worse for a program of this kind than to invite a preacher who's in shape. I think it's bad enough to have a minister who is long-winded anyway, but in me you have a double portion, I am a decathlon man as well. You all know they never stop, they just go on and on and on, and I've even had the privilege of teaching a little bit of philosophy and I dare think, daresay that all of you know that philosophers can go down deeper and stay longer and come up with lists more than most anybody else. [Laughter]

So, in the brief time allotted me I am going to try to suggest something I've discerned in this world of sweat and blood and grime and grit, in the world of muscle and bone that might be related to the aspirations, the spiritual aspirations of men and women. That might be so concretely related to life that perhaps its preparation and frame is indispensable in the life of a young boy or a girl. I've come to believe, friends, that there is heart and soul in athletics. I've come to believe that some of the greatest principles for living can be seen the clearest in this tremendous world of athletic competition. I suppose I'm a great deal like the apostle Paul, and I don't know if you friends know it or not but he was one of the most avid sports fans in probably the history of humanity. I don't know if you like to think of him in arterial terms or not but but I see Paul again and again and again as he must have made his way down into the Olympic stadiums of the Greco-Roman world. And as he rubbed shoulders with people in the thrilling athletic spectacle that was there, I can see Paul up, up in the stadium as he watched the marathon runners for example, way back in ancient Greece. I can feel the tingle of excitement that must

have swept through the stadium as these marathon runners would go up to their mark and they would lay aside the weights—you know they used to train with weights on their bodies and on their sandals—they would lay them aside and go up to the mark and then as the man there would set them off, they would begin to run. And I can see Paul as in that situation throbbing with excitement as the people began to cheer and roar. Paul looked up and began to get a vision of the Christian race of life as he said, “Let us lay aside every weight and hinderance seeing as we are encompassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses. Let us lay it aside and the sin which does so easily beset us. And let us run with patience the race which is set before us, looking unto Jesus. The starter and the judge of our race.” Paul saw in the world of sport many great analogies of the spiritual struggle, of the spiritual attempt. You don’t really understand Paul I think, friends, until you see his competitive flair. You see it out there when you see the men contesting for an Olympic gold medal or an Olympic wreath as it was in that day. As Paul would look out and say, “Know you not that all men would enter a race but only one receives the prize” and then maybe through gritted teeth he would say, “go out to win.” Go out to win! As he would say, “I don’t fight as one beating the air, I go out to run that race for victory!” Paul saw in sport written large some of the great ideals that would apply even to the spiritual realm. I think it’s a rather strange thing that Paul should refer to sport, to give the greatest analogy of his life when he said, “Timothy, I fought a good fight. I ran a good race. And henceforth for me there is laid round a crown of righteousness.”

Paul saw in sport, friends, what I see first-hand again and again and again as you’re in this world rubbing shoulders with men as you see them struggle, as you see them, perspiration running down their faces, their lungs gasping for air, as you see these men with parched lips striving for

records: you see life. You see life in some of its greatest symbolisms I don't know if many of you have thought much about it or not, but being in the world of sport, you're forced to think about it. The very thing that it takes to make a champion in the world of sport is exactly what it takes to make a champion in any realm of life. The same qualities involved in a champion rising to the top, the discipline, the control, the work, the faith, the patience, the temperament, all of the things that go into the heart of a champion are the same things that a man must have if he is going to succeed in any realm of life.

When you see a swimmer as I did in Toronto, Canada, reaching out in fifty-degree water, swimming on and on and on, mile after mile through the night into the morning, when you see a man swim thirty-nine and a half miles, fatigued, worn out, gasping for air with lips blue. When you see the man touch the other shore having conquered that lake, you see the elements of greatness. When you see a diver, Mrs. Pat McCormick, as she goes up on top of a tower and as she goes off repeatedly to hit the water. When you see her and her husband will say, "Well, Pat your foot didn't go in straight and you were a little bit off balance." You see her go up there working six, eight, nine hours a day. And of course culminating in four Olympic medals in two Olympic Games. When you see that girl and the discipline and the patience and the practice, you see life, friends. You see it written large, this struggle for perfection, this desire to become greater. You see it in its greatness. Sport symbolizes what life needs [strong emphasis on each word]. When you see a man running the race as I saw in the Olympic Games in Melbourne, Australia, a boy by the name of Tom Courtney, when you see that boy waiting in the half mile for the last two hundred and twenty yards and when the boy moves out with all he has and begins his sprint down the straightaway after giving all that he had supposedly, and then see a boy on

the outside go up ahead of him and then see that boy—tired, worn-out, legs numb—as somehow with a new will and a prayer in his heart, knowing he has to go deeper to win that race, as the guy begins to pick his knees up and as he begins to sprint from behind, as he nips the other boy in a new Olympic record, one forty-seven point five on a slow track against the wind coming down that straightaway. When you see that friends, when you see that boy almost collapse and you see him for an hour afterwards unable to take his shoes off or even take off his clothes or put on his sweat clothes because he's so tired, having given all that he had down to the last drop of energy.

When you see that, you see what it takes to be great in living. You see it in a way the way that you can't see it any other way. So much of life is abstract. So much of the educational process, so much of preaching is abstractions. Talking about what we ought to be without dealing with the concrete methods or techniques by which you reach it. Well, friends, I want to say this in the world of sport you see what are the methods. They're not easy, but you see them. Clear cut. And I'd like to talk to you out of this world of sport as a certain set of principles that men and women must have as a certain set of principles that boys must learn out here in this field house. Oh, I know, people think in sport there's only the body, there's only muscles working, there's only sheer muscular coordination involved. I tell you no. There are the deepest aspects of the human personality coming through. On a basketball field, or a track or a tennis court, or a football field, the deepest elements of will come out. The deepest element of heart. Would you believe me? The deepest spiritual life, the deepest character. I can only say this, I have come to believe that one of the greatest, most creative things a boy or girl can do is to play the game. Despite all the criticisms to the contrary, I think it's crucial for kids to get into this realistic

world. As Roger Bannister, the wonderful doctor of England who became the first one to run four minutes in the mile, as he wrote in his book, "Sport has a way of teaching concrete lessons in life that no other realm of life can teach quite as effectively." And he says, "In sport you learn tragedy and defeat. You learn disappointment. Of course you have glory and victory, but even when you want to be your greatest, sometimes you're beaten, and sport teaches you these lessons in the raw so you can be better prepared for life." Well friends, I've found that to be true in sport. I think men and women are greater for having gone through it. Yes, some are spoiled. Some receive so much recognition that they lose their sense of balance. But I'll daresay this, for the most part, men and women are better for having played the game. They are better because they must learn to live clean.

I know this is something which has been drilled into you throughout life, but in the world of sport you either live clean or you never reach the top. You learn to cut out of your life drinking, smoking, incontinent living. You learn to rigorously discipline your life and if you don't, you find yourself being beaten when the chips are down and the great race has come up. You learn control, and as Paul saw it so many years ago, athletes exercise self-control in all things. This they must do to achieve their crowns. How much more should we, well I wish you could be in these Olympic Games, friends, I wish you could feel the pressure that descends upon a boy as he goes out there to run a race. I wish you could see the gulps and the cold perspiration that comes out on the brow of a kid as he lines up for a race and as cold chills go all over him and he prays and asks God to help do his best in the greatest race of his life. I wish you could see it friends, and you would begin to realize how important control is. I wish you could see it boys as they don't have it and they burn themselves out and then fail in the finish. I wish you could see broad

jumpers who barely miss the toeboard by a quarter of an inch, and even though they are the greatest, they fade out and miss the gold medal. In sport you've got to learn control. Game after game I've seen, performance after performance, says one great thing about sport: you've got to control your emotions, you've got to learn poise, confidence. You either learn it or you never reach the heights that you want to reach. You've got to learn faith.

Here I wish I could tell stories of great athletes I have known and the role that faith played in their lives. I don't mean something you talk about. I don't mean theoretical definition. I mean you must learn it! You either have it or you will never accomplish. I have never seen an athlete accomplish a great mark in track and field without faith in himself. I've seen about seventy worlds records broken in my little career in sport, friends. Would you believe me if I told you this? Every one of those records were broken before the boy or the girl ever stepped foot on the track. They are broken when they make up their minds that they can do it, when their mental horizons are lifted, when they begin to believe that certain things are possible. Oh I know physiologists tell them it's impossible. There are those who say the marks will never be broken. But these young men and women come along and they go beyond the marks and others come along and they go beyond their marks. It's glorious thing of sport. No records are sacred, break. But it proves indispensably this...or irrevocably this I think: you must have faith. I remember Horace Ashenfelter in 1952, the boy that nobody gave a chance, impossible, this farm kid that couldn't possibly beat the best in Europe. But with faith that he could do it, he did it. I think of the 1956 games where athletes again and again who were not even afforded the chance of making the team made the team and were dreaming dreams of going on to even greater heights. The men who stood on the victor's stand, realizing what faith had done for their lives.

You know Jesus said something so profound years ago. I've found it to be the slogan of many athletes. You'd be surprised how many of them quote this scripture before they go down to their marks. You'd be surprised to know how many of them read their bibles to more or less prepare them spiritually for the great task that is theirs. This scripture "only believe. All things are possible if you only believe." I have talked to men who have hurled a shot far out beyond what any physicist thought possible because of faith. I've talked to boys who have ran hurdle times that men and experts said, "It'll never be done!" You see them as they run those hurdles in a new record of thirteen four. You talk to boys who say very simply, "God can help me to break the world record." And with that faith in God and with that faith in themselves, they go out to do it like Lou Jones did this past year.

You see in this world of sport the role of faith, and I've come to believe friends with all my soul no one will ever scale the heights of greatness without a tremendous faith in him or herself. You've got to believe. It's the indispensable quality upon which greatness is built. Fourthly you've got to learn to take defeat. And now I can't go into it but the amazing thing to me in sport is to see how many champions have overcome discouraged. How many men have overcome handicaps? How many great men in sport have arisen above circumstances to accomplish fantastic performances in sport? I think of Glenn Cunningham, a boy I met not long ago whose legs were practically seared off in a horrible school fire which killed his brother. I think of this man who took those very legs that spelled a crippled condition for life and out of those legs he made world records. Great triumph in the world of sport, one of the greatest milers America's ever produced. I think of a boy on the Olympic team this year named Harold Connolly who as a boy suffered a horrible crippled arm, broken again and again and much

smaller than his other one. This boy, who I suppose could have taken escape by saying, “Well there’s nothing I can do, I’ve been handicapped by life.” But this boy who kept working with this crippled, stiff arm, who kept developing it and even though it never developed to be what the other one was, compensating for the other arm. I saw that boy with a deep prayer in his heart that God would help him. One of the finest Roman Catholic boys I’ve ever met, clean-cut as they come. I saw him go into that hammer ring and on his last throw go round and in perfect control and faith he let go of that hammer, even with a crippled arm and the hammer went out for the Olympic gold medal and the championship. I saw it in a boy whose knee was so badly twisted and hurt in football they claimed, “You’ll never be able to play sport again. You’re out.” And the boy began to take that leg that spelled his very ruin and he began to work with it and he developed it and he became the second greatest shot-putter that our country had in the ‘56 games—Bill Nieder. You see boys who take obstacles and handicaps in this word of sport and transform them into power and greatness. Stories of men like Ben Hogan who in a horrible automotive wreck comes out of the thing people claim he’ll never live again, never walk again, and he comes back in a wheelchair to win the golf championship of the United States of America. You see things like that, friends, and you begin to realize that sport can teach tremendous lessons for life. And the greatest of which is perhaps this: it can teach a man to rely on a power greater than his own.

Now I know when I come to this point in my speech people always say, “Well now here comes the preacher aspect. He’s gonna start talking to us about God in a world of muscle and bone.” Friends, the amazing thing I’ve discovered in my brief years in competition is this: most boys pray. I would say this and I have no scientific verification behind it, only my little limited

experiences. Eighty-five percent of the men and women on the track and field team this year representing the United States had a deep religious faith. I went to church with them, I sat with them as they prayed. Boys like Bobby Morrow, three gold medals at age twenty-one, an outstanding Christian boy, clean-cut as they come. And when you see him go to the top you could also see him in church as he would quietly ask God to help him, as before every meal he would say his blessing, praying that God's strength would go with him. You see it in a Lou Jones, who broke the world record and Rafer Johnson who, in the last lap I know he got beat in Helsinki but he was injured. But you see this boy breaking the world's record as he says, "Oh God if you'll give me the strength, I'll give you all the glory, all the honor." And as you see that boy give a testimony of what Christ means to him down on the field. You talk to a Parry O'Brien who says, "God is my coach. God is my coach." And the boy who hurled that shot beyond the record to a great Olympic record, who holds the world's record. You talk to men like that and you begin to realize that, friends, in this world of sweat and grime, God can express himself. Here again it isn't something you talk about, you either find this power or you don't. And I'm increasingly amazed to find how many men rely on that power.

Lee Calhoun, who was the son of a Methodist preacher, tears down the runway, goes over the hurdles, hits the tape and says afterwards, "I want to thank God for giving me the strength to win this gold medal." Charlie Jenkins wins the quarter, beating Lou Jones, and he says, "Praise God for the victory." There is more than just the body that goes into these great competitions, there's spiritual power. I don't know of any biblical verse that so beautifully portrays it as this one.

"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with the wings of the eagles. They shall run and not be weary. They shall walk and not faint." It's the sort of the

thing that a young Presbyterian minister by the name Donn Moomaw, has twice All-American at UCLA, as he says, “Before every play I pray God will give me strength.” It’s what Doak Walker says, also son of a grand Presbyterian elder, who says, “Bob when I was a boy my dad said to me, ‘Doak, put God first. Play the game clean and the score will take care of itself.’” He says, “I’ve always lived by that philosophy.” It’s the experience of a Bud Held, former world record holder in the javelin who says, “I’ve never thrown that javelin my greatest distances until I completely dedicated myself to God.” It’s the experience of a Jackie Robinson, who used to...who said, “I used to worship a basketball. I used to think ‘let me show you what I can do with this basketball.’ Dribble it, hook it.” He said, “You know Bob, I substituted for that ball the living God and I never played my greatest basketball until I had God at the center of my life.” You talk to men like this, Carl Erskine, men like Robin Roberts, the greatest pitcher perhaps in baseball today. You talk to boys who have put out on the field like Otto Graham, and they say, “I never go into that game what I pray.” You begin to realize that through this medium of sport, great spiritual development is possible.

All I can say, friends, is this: I’ve come to believe that there are no greater lessons to be learned than lessons like these, of living clean, of learning control, of learning to have faith, of learning to take defeat, of learning to call on God. There are other ones—never giving up—somehow like breaking a mark because you’re pressing for the highest. I could mention others but simply to say through this field house, you may be accomplishing as much as you are through a classroom or through a pulpit. God is great enough and big enough to enter every realm of life, and I’m convinced that one of his greatest works in the modern day world is through Christian athletes who are expressing on the floor and on the field their deep faith in God.

You've done a great thing by building this field house. I mean I'll tell ya you know the sacrifice, but I'll say this: everything you've done for a Christian college will repay itself a hundredfold. I happen to believe that the fundamental basis for Christian education is two scriptures. One of them which says this, "Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, in favor with God and man." And the other is the First Commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy strength, and with all thy soul." The Christian life is the totally committed life involving the soul and the mind and the heart and the social but as well the physical. I think it's wonderful when you can build the bodies of men and also through the process of building their bodies, also build their minds and their spirits and their character as well. I thank God for the privilege of playing the game and I only hope that my children can play it, but above all I hope that through the medium of playing the game I've been able to give a witness as to what He's meant in my life. Without my conversion, friends, I would have been nothing, and it's by His grace that I stand here tonight and I know many an athlete who feel the same way. As Roger Bannister expressed it when he walked down an aisle in a Billy Graham revival meeting and as he gave his heart to the Lord he said, "I am now beginning to run my greatest race." Well there is a sense in which when I retire I hope I'm beginning to aim for the highest heights. The heights Paul had in mind when he said these words and I close with this one great vision of the apostle, this one thing I do, "Forgetting what lies behind and looking to the future I press on towards the mark for the high calling of God, in Christ Jesus my Lord."

Thank you very much. [Applause]