Good evening, and thank you for inviting Michele and me to this dinner. We are grateful for the presence of four members of our Board of Trustees—Board Chair Dan Rullo and his wife Jean, dedicated Trustee Ann Benzel, long-time Trustee Judge Klementik, and new trustee, Jim Lyons.

Let me say at the start that Michele and I have enjoyed watching all of you this year. Being a fan with a “vested” interest is one of the unexpected and best benefits of this Presidency!

Let me offer three final thoughts as we savor these seasons just passed.

First, congratulations on your team achievements this year—some fabulous individual highlights, some new records set at the College, awards won on behalf of the conference, playoffs, playoff wins and more.

Most important of all, congratulations on your GPA’s. 3.0 is a good cumulative student-athlete GPA, and almost 50% of our student athletes again made the all-academic roster for our conference. You have been just terrific—on and off the field of play.

We thank you for representing Mount Aloysius College this year. I hope that you all understand how significant that is—that you represented your college as an intercollegiate athlete. That goal is on a lot of people’s bucket lists, and very few people get to cross it off. So congratulations for that.

Second, just a few words about what is best about sport. We saw, just one year ago yesterday, one of the worst tragedies in the history of sport—4 people died and almost 200 were seriously injured at the Boston Marathon. We watched the footage over and over, we all saw that first puff of smoke from the explosion and then the 78-year old runner’s legs go wobbly near the finish line as he falls down. We watched the smoke and the two explosions over and over.

There’s a picture on the front page of that Tuesday’s Boston Globe—in the background of the shot, someone is bent over an injured runner, administering care. I looked close at the picture and realized that that “someone” was my brother Jack. Jack’s been volunteering as an athletic trainer at the Boston Marathon for years, and he was stationed at the finish line only yards from the scene of the first explosion. On the footage that ran over and over that first night, you can see Jack—just seconds after the blast occurred—running towards—not away—from the blast.
He only did what so many other first responders did, what so many other Americans, Bostonians, emergency and medical personnel, soldiers, police, nurses, fellow athletes and other caregivers did. He ran over to help out—not thinking about his own safety and never a thought about whether the victims were runners or spectators, white or black, old or young, Democrats or Republicans. And I like to think that at least some of what drove Jack to run towards—and not away from—that tragedy was his experience as a teammate—the same experience you have all had this year. When a teammate is down, you go and help, not run away.

Thomas Jefferson wrote once that “it’s part of the American character to consider nothing as desperate.” He wrote those words at a time when Boston was a city of heroes for completely different reasons—for standing up to an oppressor, for hanging tough as the very first “guerilla” fighters in modern military history. This week, they celebrated their city full of Boston Strong heroes again, only this time not “the revolutionaries to whom Jefferson referred, but the random “Good Samaritans” who stepped up after the bombings—the kind of people I like to call “teammates.”

Which brings me to my last thought—on the idea of team. I couldn’t sleep one night in the fall, and instead of counting sheep, I started counting up how many teams I played on in my life. Believe it or not, I got up to more than 60—from little league baseball at 8 all the way to the last rugby field I limped off at 32. I still wasn’t asleep, so then I started trying to figure out where I had the most fun. And after sorting through the five or six best experiences I had, I realized there was absolutely no connection between our team record and the quotient of fun that I had. By the way, in my midnight reverie I came up with a perfect formula for measuring my “fun” quotient—how deep were my memories of teammates, of actual plays, and of moments on and off the field of play.

Sure, it was fun to win titles, and we grabbed our share. But the two best experiences I had as a student-athlete were on teams that finished at the opposite ends of the league table—one won it all and the other won a grand total of 4 games out of forty-odd in a very long first-ever rugby season.

On that second team, we always wished we could win more, and we never stopped trying our brains out. It was an Irish University rugby team where we had to meet up early mornings in the center of Dublin just to catch a bus together to some far flung destination out of town just to get a game each weekend.

That whole season, the same fifteen guys showed up every Saturday and Sunday for those games. It was all about the camaraderie, all about the fact that we loved being out there representing our school, all about the fact that we never stopped playing hard, all about the fact that we never stopped trying to get better. We just weren’t good enough at key positions, not deep enough as a team over all. But we enjoyed being out in the crisp air on lush green Irish playing fields (sometimes literally pastures)—backsides to the wind—and we enjoyed the after match camaraderie with each other. They say that time has a wonderful way of weeding out the trivial. And it’s amazing how trivial some things will seem twenty years down the road, that couldn’t have been more important at the time.

My simple message tonight is that winning is important, and it is often great fun. But in the end the magic is in the idea of the “team”—the relationships and interactions on and off the field of play, the habits that broker well in life long after the playing days are over. Those are the things you carry with you long after the shine is off all those first place medals, and the championship trophy has literally fallen into pieces. Trust me on this.

So thank you for representing Mount Aloysius so well. And have fun on the field, and remember your teammates off it.