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Dedication of the Renovation and Naming of Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall

Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie

Assembly Hall

Friday, October 14, 2016

2:00 p.m.

1. "CITIES FOR A DAY"

The renowned Australian architect, Rod Sheard, who designed both the Sydney Olympic Stadium and London's Olympic Stadium—making him the only architect in the modern era to have designed two Olympic stadia—writes that stadia and sports arenas are “cities for a day” that “host the population of a city for a few hours ... and punctuate our lives with enjoyment, and sometimes disappointment. The ideal (arena),” he writes, “is clearly the one in which our team always wins.”¹

But, as Sheard goes on to write, what people really want in sports arenas are comfort and safety. We want, he writes, “buildings that allow us to be comfortable in our enjoyment of the event, buildings in which it is safe for us to become part of the crowd, to feel comradeship, togetherness, (and to feel that we are) part of something big.”²

Today, we recall the many momentous occasions that live on in the collective memory of the millions of Hoosiers and others who have experienced that sense of togetherness here in Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall. Today, we celebrate the major improvements that have been made to one of college basketball's most iconic venues—“the Carnegie Hall of basketball,”³ as it has been called—so that future generations of Hoosier fans can

¹ R.K. Sheard, Foreword to P. Thompson, J.J.A Tolloczko, and J.N. Clarke (eds.), *Stadia, Arenas, and Grandstands: Design Construction and Operation*, (Spon Press, 1998), xvii-xviii.

² Ibid.

³ Attributed to sportscaster Gus Johnson, Quoted in ["Indiana's Assembly Hall"](#). Indiana Athletics. March 27, 2012. Retrieved April 2, 2015.

continue to enjoy similarly unforgettable experiences and feel the sense that they are part of something big.

2. HISTORIC, INNOVATIVE FACILITIES

The rich history of IU basketball includes, of course, the history of the facilities that have been its home.

IU's first Assembly Hall, built in 1896, was a wooden building that, by modern standards, more closely resembled a large house than a basketball arena. Located on the east side of Owen Hall, the building, with a capacity of only 600, was the site of IU's first official home basketball game in 1901.

In 1917, men's basketball moved to the Men's Gymnasium, now part of the facilities of the School of Public Health. When fans complained that the wooden backboards obstructed their view, a local mirror and glass company created backboards of inch-and-a-half-thick plate glass, and the Men's Gymnasium became the first facility in the country to use glass backboards.⁴

Basketball grew enormously in popularity over the next decade, and IU needed a larger arena. The fieldhouse, now known as the Wildermuth Intramural Center, opened in 1928. It was the state's first true basketball stadium and served as one of college basketball's classic venues for more than 30 years.

In 1960, men's basketball moved into the new fieldhouse, now known as the Harry Gladstein Fieldhouse. It was the site of two historic performances by Jimmy Rayl, who scored 56 points—twice—in games against Big Ten rivals Minnesota and Michigan State.

⁴ Jason Hiner, *Indiana University Basketball Encyclopedia*. (Sports Publishing, 2005). p. 447.

And in 1971, the new Assembly Hall, named in honor of IU's first basketball arena and multipurpose building of the same name, became home not only to the men's basketball team, but also to women's basketball, which became a varsity sport in that same year.

Over the years, Assembly Hall has hosted concerts by such luminary artists as Elvis Presley, the Rolling Stones, and the newest Nobel laureate in literature, Bob Dylan; visits by dignitaries including the Dalai Lama; and, of course, hundreds of thrilling IU men's and women's basketball games, witnessed by millions of fans.

Assembly Hall has been home to three national men's basketball championship teams and 14 conference championship teams, including two in the last four years.

It is a beloved building where countless people have had unforgettable experiences, including their first game, special family memories, and moments of excitement, heartbreak, and joy. And over the years, it has achieved the stature of one of the most revered and iconic basketball arenas in America.

But when we began these renovations, Assembly Hall was nearly 44 years old and in need of major renovation so that it could continue to serve future generations of student athletes and fans, and maintain its legendary status.

3. SPECIAL THANKS

There is a long list of people to whom we owe enormous debts of gratitude for helping us reach this moment, and, in thanking them, we must, of course, begin with the family whose name this arena now bears: the Simon Skjodt family.

As I had the great pleasure of announcing in December of 2013, IU alumna Cindy Simon Skjodt and her philanthropic organization, the Samarian Foundation, made an

extraordinarily generous gift of \$40 million—the largest gift in the history of IU Athletics—to be used for the much-needed extensive renovation of Assembly Hall.

Cindy and her family have been remarkably generous supporters of Indiana University for many, many years.

The Simon family name will forever be interwoven with the great achievements of Indiana University. Their vision and support for the Helene G. Simon Hillel Center, IU's world class Jacobs School of Music, the award-winning Simon Hall, and the nationally-recognized Melvin and Bren Simon Cancer Center in Indianapolis have had a tremendous and transformative effect on this university.

In 2013, Cindy generously donated \$2 million to endow a chair in the Herron School of Art and Design's Art Therapy Program. The same year, she also made a generous gift of \$1.5 million to endow the Melvin Simon Chair in Philanthropy in the IU Lilly Family School of Philanthropy in honor of her late father, Melvin Simon.

Cindy also serves on the IU Foundation Board of Directors and the Women's Philanthropy Leadership Council. She served as a co-chair of the highly successful *Matching the Promise* campaign, and now co-chairs IU Athletics' portion of the current university-wide *For All Bicentennial Campaign*.

I know that this gift and this renovation have a deep personal meaning for Cindy, as she has many fond memories of attending basketball games here with her late father, Mel Simon. I was privileged enough to have heard a conversation between Cindy and Mel, not long before his death, in which they reminisced about those times.

I would like to once again extend, on behalf of Indiana University, our most sincere thanks to Cindy Simon Skjodt, to her husband Paul, who is also with us today, and to their entire family. Please join me in thanking them.

Your generosity will touch the lives of countless student-athletes, coaches, alumni, and friends of IU, and it will help IU's men's and women's basketball programs to continue to thrive and excel for many decades to come.

I also want to thank another visionary alumnus, Mark Cuban, whose extraordinarily generous gift of \$5 million in 2015, established the Mark Cuban Center for Sports Media and Technology, which is housed in Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall. His generosity and vision have allowed IU to create a first-of-its-kind, cutting-edge, student-focused video, broadcasting and technology center that makes IU Athletics the national leader in 3-D broadcast and replay, virtual reality, and 3-D virtual studio technologies. On behalf of Indiana University, then, let me express our deepest gratitude to Mark Cuban for his generosity and his vision in support of this path-breaking center that will benefit IU Athletics, our student-athletes and fans, and students in a wide variety of academic disciplines across the campus.

The vision and leadership of Cindy Simon Skjodt and Mark Cuban have inspired many others to join the effort to preserve and improve this great college basketball venue. On behalf of the university, I extend our most grateful thanks to all the alumni and friends who helped make this superb renovation possible.

I also want to commend Athletics Director Fred Glass and his staff, including the Big Ten Coaches of the Year—Tom Crean and Teri Moren—and their current and former players—for all they have done to help make this project a success.

I also want to commend Tom Morrison, vice president for capital planning and facilities, as well as the many design and construction professionals, both internal and external, who oversaw this complex but visionary renovation.

And, finally, I would like to thank our Trustees for their steadfast and enthusiastic support—not only for this renovation—but also for their support over recent years for the renovation, renewal, and repurposing of IU's extensive existing facilities on all

campuses—and, more generally, for their continued and ongoing efforts to guard and care for the welfare of our institution.

4. CONCLUSION

Dr. James Naismith, the inventor of basketball, said in a speech in Indianapolis in 1936 that “basketball really had its beginning in Indiana, which remains today the center of the sport.”⁵

Eighty years later, most Hoosiers would agree that Indiana is still the center of basketball. The renovation we celebrate today will ensure that future generations of Hoosiers will be safe and comfortable as they gather in this “city for a day” to enjoy unforgettable experiences as so many others have done over more than four remarkable decades.

⁵ James Naismith, as quoted in Herb Schwomeyer, *Hoosier Hysteria: A History of Indiana High School Basketball*, (Mitchell-Fleming Printing, 1980).