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Wilkinson Hall Groundbreaking
Remarks of Michael A. McRobbie
President, Indiana University
Shuel Academic Center Lobby, Memorial Stadium
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1. INTRODUCTION

In classical times, the Greeks and Romans often located all of their facilities for athletic competition—gymnasia; stadia; running tracks; palaestra, where wrestling matches were held—together in one central location for the benefit of both athletes and spectators. The ancient Greek geographer, Strabo, described Rome’s Campus Martius as such a place, and he described what a vital and vigorous place it was—one of the centers of social life in ancient Rome.

With today’s symbolic groundbreaking for a new home for IU’s wrestling and volleyball programs, we break ground for an arena, Wilkinson Hall, that will consolidate all of IU’s major athletic facilities into one neighborhood, much as the Campus Martius did in ancient Rome, ensuring that, it too, will be complete as one of the great centers of social life at IU.

2. IU WRESTLING AND VOLLEYBALL

The history of wrestling at Indiana University dates back to 1908, and had its origins in the classroom. Elmer Jones, who had earned honors as a wrestler at Columbia University, where he earned his doctoral degree, joined the IU faculty as professor of education. Ross Netherton, one of IU’s earliest athletic directors, was aware of Jones’s

wrestling prowess by virtue of having attended Columbia himself before coming to Indiana University as a student-athlete. While still an IU student, Netherton applied for and received the position of athletic director—and he urged Jones to start a wrestling program at IU. During the 1908-09 academic year, Jones offered a class in wrestling. One of his students, Walter Bodenhafer, went on to win IU's first conference wrestling title and to become the first student-athlete to letter in wrestling at Indiana University.¹

From that initial class in wrestling, a program was built that has gone on to produce more than 50 individual All-Americans, 12 individual NCAA champions, one team national title, and seven Olympians.

Volleyball, too, is a sport with a rich history. It was invented by William Morgan in a YMCA gymnasium in 1895 in Holyoke, Massachusetts—just a few miles from where Morgan's friend, James Naismith, created the game of basketball only four years earlier.

Varsity volleyball came to Indiana University in 1975, just three years after the passage of Title IX, which also brought women's basketball, women's cross-country, and softball to IU as varsity sports. Under their first head coach, Ann Lawver, the IU volleyball team won the state championship in their first season of competition.

Over the years, team members have won recognition as All-Americans, Academic-All Americans, and have received many departmental honors.

Members of the team have also recently joined players from all 14 Big Ten schools to travel to Europe, where they competed on the court, participated in community service initiatives, and experienced the cultures of some of the world's greatest cities as part of the Big Ten Volleyball Foreign Tour Team.

¹ Bob Hammel and Kit Klingelhofer, *Indiana University: Glory of Old IU*, (Sports Publishing LLC, 1999).
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Of course, in all sports at Indiana University, our athletes are, and always will be, students as well as athletes. Students in both the wrestling and volleyball programs have achieved noteworthy success in the classroom.

This summer, the Big Ten named 68 IU student-athletes as Big Ten Distinguished Scholars for 2016-17. This was the largest number ever in IU history and it included a number of members of the wrestling and volleyball programs. And eight IU wrestlers and seven members of the volleyball team were named to the Academic All-Big Ten team last year, with grade point averages of 3.0 or better.

3. WILKINSON HALL

While they have achieved great success on the mat, on the court, and in the classroom, student-athletes in both programs have been holding matches in a less-than-adequate facility. The University Gym at 10th and the Bypass was built in 1963. The building was originally part of the University School, a laboratory school of the IU School of Education.

The new Wilkinson Hall will further strengthen our popular programs in wrestling and volleyball, two sports with very rich histories, and it will give student-athletes the resources they need to compete at the very highest level.

The splendid new arena will also give student-athletes in both sports closer proximity to student housing, and it will give the wrestling team much improved access to their current practice space in Simon Skjodt Assembly Hall.

4. THE JAY WILKINSON FAMILY

The generosity of Jay Wilkinson and his family has already had a transformative impact on IU Athletics and it will continue to have an impact on IU's student-athletes for many years to come.

In 2009, we dedicated the North End Zone Student-Athlete Development Center, which has greatly enhanced the game day experience for IU football fans. The North End Zone is home, of course, to one of the nation's largest strength and conditioning centers for student-athletes. After a generous 2012 gift from Jay and his late wife, Nancy, to provide operating resources and fund equipment and training needs, the center was named the W. Jay and Nancy Wilkinson Performance Center. IU student-athletes, of course, know it simply as "the Wilk."

In 2016, Jay endowed The Nancy Wilkinson Athletic Scholarship to honor his late wife. The scholarship is given annually to at least one female varsity athlete.

This fall, we announced another extraordinarily generous gift to Indiana University by the Wilkinson family—a \$10 million contribution to the funding of the arena for which we break ground today. In recognition of this remarkable gift, the new arena will, of course, be known as Wilkinson Hall.

On behalf of Indiana University, I want to once again express how deeply grateful we are to Jay and his family for this wonderful gift and for their longstanding support of IU's student-athletes. We will hear from Jay in a few moments, but would all of you join me once again in expressing our most sincere thanks to Jay and his family with a vigorous round of applause.

5. CONCLUSION

The new Wilkinson Hall will be a venue that will not only greatly enhance the experience for fans of IU volleyball and wrestling, but it will also be a venue that will serve IU's outstanding athletes well in the decades to come.

Moreover, just as participation in college sports has done since the beginning of intercollegiate athletics over a century ago, Wilkinson Hall will help give IU student-athletes the discipline and skills they need to succeed in college and in life.

All of us look forward to witnessing their athletic and academic triumphs and their continued personal growth.

Thank you very much.