

Joe Lapchick Character Award Foundation Luncheon

Most Reverend John O. Barres Remarks

September 20, 2019

I am Bishop John Barres, the Bishop of the Diocese of Rockville Centre. I serve 1.6 million Catholics on Long Island.

It is a great honor to be with you today and to support the noble goals of the Joe Lapchick Character Award Foundation. I too offer my congratulations to Verne Lundquist, Coach Chris Dailey and Coach Bobby Cremins for the way they model for us the character and virtue lessons of Coach Lapchick and his successor at St. John's University, Coach Carnessecca.

I have been asked to offer a few words before I offer our grace this afternoon.

Two years ago at this luncheon, I shared with you the impact of my CYO Coach and former Iona basketball player Joe Gallick on my life as a Catholic Bishop.

He taught our 7th and 8th grade teams the John Wooden UCLA full court press which has connected to my call to be a missionary Catholic Bishop on Long Island on a 24/7 full court press of Catholic Evangelization.

Today, I'd like to briefly share how my Princeton basketball experience in the Coach Pete Carril era has been critical to my service as a Bishop and Successor of the Apostles on Long Island. Coach Carril received the Lapchick Character award in 2011.

I grew up in Westchester County on the 1969-70 Knicks and Dollar Bill Bradley. I marveled at this Princeton Rhodes Scholar and was inspired by John McPhee's book on Bradley *A Sense of Where You Are*, still one of the great pieces of sports non-fiction. My friends and I rocked in rhythm with Marv Albert: "Frazier dribbles into the fore court. He sees Bradley in the corner. Side jump – Yes!"

Then in ninth grade, I remember watching Princeton's run of upsets in the 1975 NIT at Madison Square Garden and seeing Coach Pete Carril and his players celebrate on the court after their final upset victory over Providence. I was mesmerized by an Ivy League team finishing the season at number 12 in the country. Anyone remember Armond Hill, Mickey Steurer, Barnes Hauptfuhrer, Timmy van Bloomestyn and Peter Molloy?

Little did I know, watching the Madison Square Garden celebration as a ninth grader that I would one day become part of this Princeton basketball family and that Coach Carril, a past Lapchick Character award honoree, would become a friend and mentor in my future life.

I was a JV basketball point guard at Princeton from 1978 to 1981. My JV coaches were Bob Dukiet, Mickey Steurer and Eddie Reilly. I celebrated Coach Dukiet's funeral Mass in June of 2009.

Princeton basketball was a critical dimension of my character formation and my growth as a human being. As we all know, Princeton basketball is a beautiful blend of the building up and execution of fundamentals, such a precise chest passes (which raise shooting percentages), the setting up and timing behind effective picks, and the timing and execution of backdoor cuts and layups mixed with high percentage three point shooting and tenaciously intelligent defense.

To this day, Princeton basketball is an art form that involves intuitional team chemistry built on the foundation of sharply-honed fundamentals and radical unselfishness.

What impact did the Princeton JV basketball point-guard experience have on my future life as a Catholic priest and bishop?

First, I am convinced that the Holy Spirit prepared me to be a point guard in the Catholic Church as a priest and bishop by the experience of being a Princeton JV point guard. Just as the Apostles were called from their fishing nets, I was called to serve as a priest and bishop from the basketball nets of Jadwin Gym.

We all know that in any context it's all about leadership, chemistry, sacrifice, discipline and seeing the entire floor as a point guard whether that floor is at Jadwin Gym or that floor is the global mission of mercy of the Church and world I love and serve as a Catholic Bishop.

I draw on the lessons of Princeton basketball every day in my life as a Bishop – whether that means getting the fundamentals right and finely tuned as Coach Carril always insisted or whether that means springing up immediately from the floor after taking the charges or diving for the loose balls of life.

I share with the young people of Long Island a unique card. On one side is my formal picture as a Catholic bishop, and on the other side is a picture of me as Princeton JV player at Jadwin Gym, going above the rim for a layup. You can tell it is a JV game because there are absolutely no fans in the stands!

My teammate trailing me on the layup is Bobby Doar. His father, civil rights attorney John Doar, courageously walked the first African American student, James Meredith, into the University of Mississippi on October 1st, 1962.

I think the card helps young people to understand how God works lovingly and intimately in their lives and in their destinies. It also helps cultivate a new harvest of vocations to the priesthood!

One of my favorite stories about the card involves meeting the mother of a 7th grade student who had installed my basketball card on his room wall right between posters of Michael Jordan and LeBron James.

We had a great laugh together and I laughed even more later when I imagined myself being dunked on, “posterized,” and “facebookfriended” by Michael and LeBron simultaneously on that wall!¹

Each of our lives are unique but what we have in common and what we celebrate today in Coach Lapchick, Verne Lundquist, Coach Daily and Coach Cremins is that the game of basketball, its lessons and its virtue building has helped direct and influence our lives, our characters and our destinies.

¹ A substantial portion of these remarks are directly quoted or adapted from Bishop Barres' chapter in *Apostolic Athletes: 11 Priests and Bishops Reveal How Sports Helped Them Follow Chris's Call* (Collected by Trent Beattie), (Stockbridge, MA: Marian Press, 2017), 85-106.

God our Creator,

Thank you for the gift of being together today and the gift of sharing together the character-forging and virtue-driven history, stories and dimensions of the game of basketball that we all love. Help us all to be instruments of social justice and instruments of your Mercy. Bless us oh Lord and these thy gifts that we are about to receive from thy bounty. Amen.