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A Triumph of Technology: The Georgia Tech Olympic Experience

Good evening. It is a pleasure to speak to the members of the Gainesville Georgia Tech Club on what is a propitious occasion, the beginning of Tech's 1995 fall quarter. Today, more than 3,000 freshmen will begin their academic career at Georgia Tech.

Today also marks one less Monday available to prepare for the upcoming Olympic Games—a deadline I imagine Gainesville is counting off as well.

Like Atlanta, like Georgia Tech, you will welcome the world to your home city this summer. The Lake Lanier boating events promise to be some of the most exciting and visually stimulating competitions of the Games.

Like Atlanta, like Georgia Tech, you are preparing for the event of a lifetime. Like Georgia Tech, like many in Atlanta, you must also continue to do your everyday jobs—adding Olympic preparation and staging to your already full plate. Because of the opportunity we both share, I would imagine you understand more than most that when I talk about the Olympics, I want to stress that—unlike the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games, an organization formed just for the purpose of staging the Games—at Georgia Tech, we look at the Olympics as an event that will bring long-term gain to our students. Our primary goal is education—the Olympics are a means to an end.

I imagine you feel the same way about its effect on your city. I imagine you see beyond the thrill of athletic victory to the other successes of the Olympics—namely the benefits to the Olympic cities and the institutes of higher education involved in the Games. Today, I'd like to speak to you about Georgia Tech's Olympic participation—and the Olympic dreams we expect to realize.

Most people are not even aware of the link between higher education and the Olympics. And that's understandable. On the surface, higher education and the Olympics do not seem to share much common ground. However, if we look at history, we find the link that was forged between the two during the founding of the modern Olympics.

Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the father of the modern Olympics, was asked once why he restored the Olympic Games. His answer:

“To enoble and strengthen sports...and to enable them to better fulfill the educational role incumbent upon them in the world.”

Throughout Olympic history, universities and colleges have played important roles. But, the 1996 Olympics fulfill Baron de Coubertin’s ideal more than any other Olympics. Never before in Olympic history has higher education played such an integral role in the planning, construction, and staging of the Games.

Olympic research

In fact, were it not for Georgia Tech, the Olympics might not be heading to Atlanta at all. If you remember, back in 1990, the odds were very much against Atlanta winning the Olympic bid. Athens was the sentimental favorite and many of Atlanta's venue sites could only be found in the dreams and plans of Atlanta Olympic planners.

That’s where Georgia Tech made the difference. Through a state-of-the-art interactive video and multimedia presentation, Georgia Tech helped make Atlanta’s Olympic vision a reality. The presentation combined animation, computer graphics, aerial photography, video, and even satellite topographical photographs to depict the Atlanta of the 1996 Olympiad. It was an amazing demonstration—and a superb demonstration of the power of technology.

After this feat, many schools might have rested on their Olympic laurels. Not Georgia Tech. We will serve as both Olympic and Paralympic Villages, as well as the site of five Olympic and four Paralympic events. We’re also engaged in many Olympic research projects. Never before in Olympic history has one school played such an important Olympic role.

To demonstrate just how intricately linked the Olympics and Georgia Tech are, let’s take a quick poll. When you think of the Olympics, what symbol comes to mind? Before you start guessing, I’ll give you one hint—Izzy is not the correct answer.

(Take audience answers until they bring up the torch).

Right. The torch. Well, constructing the torch of the 1995 Olympics was the responsibility of Georgia Tech researchers. And, as you would expect from a torch created by Georgia Tech, the torch design is both high tech and practical. Features

of the torch include the ability to burn for 30 minutes without refueling; withstand wind and rain; and withstand temperature and altitude changes.

Creating the torch is just one of the many Olympic research projects taken on by Georgia Tech researchers. For example, to an Olympic athlete, milliseconds matter. So, to help athletes from all over the world find the best possible stroke, movement, or position, a team of Georgia Tech and Olympic scientists are engaged in a motion and mechanics study—using new computer monitoring technology to analyze the movements of Olympic athletes to help them achieve peak performance.

For the first time ever in Olympic history, a special force-measuring device will be installed in the 10-meter tower in the Georgia Tech Aquatic Center. The instrument will measure the forces acting on the diver as each athlete initiates a dive. This information, together with position and time data captured using high-speed video of each dive, will enable divers and scientists from participating Olympic countries to reconstruct each dive for performance analysis.

After the Olympics leave town, the world's second largest sports competition, will arrive in Atlanta: the Paralympics. These disabled athletes will also benefit from Georgia Tech research. A team in our Center for Rehabilitative Technology is creating a wheelchair tie-down system for athletes to utilize during the javelin, shot-put, and discus competitions.

Not all Olympic research is sports-related. During the Olympics, Georgia Tech personnel will use their active research work in telemedicine to set up mobile health sites in rural Olympic venue sites. These sites will be connected to Georgia Baptist Hospital via telecommunications technology—providing a telemedical link between Atlanta physicians and the rural Olympic venues.

As you can see, technology is playing a key role in the 1996 Olympics—and so is Georgia Tech.

The Olympic Village

Never before in Olympic history has one campus held an entire Olympic Village. The Olympic Village at Georgia Tech will include 33 residence halls housing 16,000 athletes and officials. But the Village will be much more than a "hotel" for athletes. The Village will be the social, intellectual, and cultural hub for the athletes and feature a coffee house, informational kiosks, a dance club, restaurants, souvenir shops—even a movie theater.

To our students great chagrin, the buildings that will be transformed to house these facilities will revert back to classrooms after the Olympics are over.

As part of the "FutureNet" telecommunications technology awarded to Georgia Tech, athletes will have the latest, state-of-the-art computer and telecommunications information available. From their residence facility, athletes will be able to access information about their upcoming athletic events; they will even be able to preview a computerized picture of their venue.

Athletic venues

If our role as the Olympic Village were not enough, we will also host two athletic venues. Diving and swimming—including synchronized swimming, competitive swimming, and water polo will be held in our new Aquatic Center.

Semi-final boxing rounds will be held in the Coliseum currently undergoing construction.

Also, let's not forget that Tech will contribute world-class athletes to Olympic competition. Tech alumnus Derrick Adkins is the world champ in the 400 meter hurdles this year—a true gold medal aspirant. Likewise, alumnus Derrick Mills and students Jeanine Jones and Octavius Terry are strong candidates to make the US team in track and field. Alumnus Barbaro Ponce has qualified to compete in marksmanship in the Paralympics. And, our own Basketball Coach Bobby Cremins is one of the coaches of the Dream Team.

As you can see, Georgia Tech is committed to making the 1996 Olympics the best ever and is an integral part of Olympic activities and preparation.

For the Olympics, we'll be moving classrooms, relocating faculty and staff, even rescheduling our entire summer quarter. Worst of all, I'll lose my prime campus parking spot.

The construction has inconvenienced students, faculty, and visitors alike. I never thought that anything could be louder than a fraternity party in full swing. I was less than thrilled one frosty October morning to find out I was wrong—when my wife and I were nearly bounced out of bed by racket caused by a very large jackhammer.

Hosting the Olympic Village and preparing for the Olympics is a lot of hard work. Which brings us to the question. Why bother? What's in it for Georgia Tech?

Olympic benefits

First and perhaps most importantly, the Olympics will leave an impressive legacy. The most obvious is housing. After the Olympics, seven new residence halls and 2,700 more beds will be available to Tech students. After the Olympics, Tech will be able to provide on-campus housing for approximately 70 percent of the student body—compared to the current 40 percent.

ACOG has provided \$27 million for this housing. The remaining debt for Tech is \$93 million; which will be retired over 20 years through fees charged to students for their rooms.

The Futurenet telecommunications technology is yet another legacy. Once the athletes are gone, our students will have cutting-edge computer and communications access within their residence halls—allowing them to get a jump on students in other universities lacking such equipment.

The Olympics will also affect the way our intercollegiate and intramural athletes do their jobs after the Games are over. To improve Georgia Tech sports, the Center for Sports Performance is currently being constructed on campus. This Center is designed to follow-up on the knowledge gained in the Olympics to help Tech athletes improve their athletic performance through sports science, nutrition, psychology, and training.

Just behind the legacy for the campus in order of importance is the exposure Georgia Tech will gain during the Olympics. Never before in Tech's history has such an opportunity presented itself. To take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime chance, it is our goal to showcase Georgia Tech to the world. For as Alexander Fleming, the discoverer of penicillin noted: "The unprepared mind cannot see the outstretched hand of opportunity," or to put it another way: we're not about to sit back and let our Olympic opportunity pass us by.

When the Olympics are over, we want the world to leave Atlanta knowing the following:

- that Georgia Tech is a nationally competitive research university;
- that our students and faculty are world-class; and
- that we are a research institute providing useful, innovative research to government, industry, and business.

During the next year, you will undoubtedly hear much more about Georgia Tech. And as you do, I'd like you to bear in mind a quote from baseball great and armchair philosopher Dizzy Dean, "It ain't braggin' if you kin' do it."

At Tech, we can do it. Our goals for the future are ambitious—but achievable. They include:

- Solidify and improve reputation as one of the top technological universities in the world—improve in non-engineering areas essential to being a major university;
- Develop potent programs in the over-arching issues of the day—e.g., biotechnology, telecommunications, and environmental technology;
- Capitalize on Olympic facilities to create a powerful learning environment for our students on campus; and
- Work in partnership with Georgia to see it develop as a state known for high technology and a place where people want to live. If Georgia succeeds, we succeed. If we succeed, Georgia succeeds.

As I said before, these goals are achievable. And, the Olympics...the exposure we gain...and the infrastructure legacy we reap...will help us achieve those goals.

I'd like to close with a final Olympic quote. Baron Pierre de Coubertin once said: "The most important thing in the Olympics is not winning, but taking part."

Georgia Tech is doing more than simply taking part—and our students will be the winners.

Thank you.