



Duke Press Conference Quotes

Brennan Besser

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Opening Statement:

"Today is a really exciting day. We're announcing the Walk On America Campaign and actually launching the online platform. This summer project is really near and dear to my heart. I have four older sisters. Jaqueline, who is immediately older than me, who is 23 years old, has special needs. She is nonverbal, developmentally delayed, and she is really one of my best friends. She has helped make me the person I am today. And this summer we are launching Walk On America, which is a national effort to raise awareness and charitable donations for the organizations which help support the IDD community, which stands for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. It's a very important subset of the American population and its global. And it's commonly hidden, so what we're hoping to do is shine a light on a part of the American community that doesn't necessarily have that strong of a voice. We're hoping to bring a lot of positive awareness to this group. What we're going to be doing is traveling from Seattle to New York via bicycle. I'll be riding a bike and in roughly 70 days we're going to try to stop in somewhere near 50 cities. In each city, we hope to connect with the community by hosting a basketball clinic or community event, maybe a walk or a run. I'm going to have Rachel Besser, who is my sister, helping me along this trip. She's been unbelievably helpful so far. She has a background in media and she's a creative director in New York, so we're going to be vlogging this trip via YouTube. If you go to www.walkonamerica.org, the site is live. Currently, we are filing for non-profit 501-C3, so that all charitable donations will be tax deductible. All of the money will be handled through a donor advised fund and we're really excited to announce the launch. It's a big undertaking. It's something I've always wanted to do and to have the support of the Duke community and the Duke fan base, which, I'm biased, but is maybe the best fan base in the world, it's a blessing to be able to walk into this national trip and have that sort of confidence behind you. It really is a rallying cry, it's a call to confidence for this community that may not have that strong of a voice and we're really looking forward to it. We're really excited. We take off on Wednesday, which is the 16th, and we're trying to remain flexible with our scheduling, although you can go online and check out our schedule. Probably on a weekly basis, we'll be uploading, maybe two weeks in advance, we'll have all of the stops on our schedule on the website, just in case there is any weather or there are any other delays. It's a fluid project, so that's all going to be live. We're really, really excited. Thank you guys."

His sisters' reactions when telling them this idea was set in stone; and knowing that money is being raised for people like her:

"I have four older sisters. My family was really excited. I thank my family. There are a lot of people I want to thank. I want to thank the Duke Athletic Department, Duke University, and my Duke Men's Basketball family. But, my immediate family was very excited. When I actually had discussed it with Rachel, who is helping me, who is one of my older sisters, I think that at first she was like, this is just one of Brennan's really big ideas. And then we started to develop a team behind it and it's now turning into a reality. I'm excited, I know they were excited, but it kind of came as a bit of a surprise, but they also know I think kind of big.

Jacqueline is very special, in the sense that you probably couldn't tell her just directly, on-on-one about the effort. She goes on YouTube and she watches Barney for hours and she just keeps clicking and clicking, whether it's Blue's Clues, Barney. If we would have told her, she probably wouldn't have been able to truly understand the significance of it, but she's right there in my heart the whole way through it. And I know that. We're doing it for her. She's the inspiration behind it. We're doing it for all of the people across the country, that's why it's a national thing. I can only imagine that if I could talk to her that she would be proud. I'm proud of all the stuff that she has been through. The adversity that she faces on a day-to-day basis. Just not being able to communicate verbally, she uses an iPad to talk, and just the challenges of that. How could we even imagine? Especially in a room like this, you are journalists, so you all understand the value of words and to not be able to express yourself, your desires, things that you want. If she's thirsty, she has to click the picture. I know she'd be excited to know that this is going on, but I don't think that it has actually sunk in."

On how his sister Jaqueline has shaped who Brennan is:

"She's impacted me in a lot of ways. Specifically, I've learned to understand what real, true patience is. Also, being a walk-on on the team, you learned service. My goal on the team is not necessarily to improve but to make others better and I really learned that primarily through Jacqueline. An example, we'd go out to family brunches on Sunday, so you go in McDonald's, because she couldn't communicate. If she wanted to push the shopping cart, then there was a meltdown. We like to stray away from the word 'tantrum,' because it's not like she was doing it because she was trying to act out, but only because she couldn't express herself. When you grow up and you're outside in public and it's like all hands on deck because your sister's on the ground because she's upset and everyone's looking at you, you just learn to develop a toughness of character, in the sense that you're not embarrassed because it happens all the time. Then you grow up just thinking of things differently, because you can appreciate certain things. You can value speech. My body is a temple. I've learned that through Duke Basketball, but I've also learned that through the fact that I have a sister who was born with disabilities. It's things like that. There are millions of lessons that she's taught me, but it's those big things. Like, how do you deal with adversity? What is it like to have a best friend and a sibling that every day of their life, really when my parents get older, when the responsibility of Jacqueline is going to end up doing, falls in the hands of myself and my siblings. You mature at a faster rate. But, I love her. She's been great. I would not change a thing. She's awesome."

On the composition of the team/group on the road with Brennan:

"We'll have a team of roughly four or five people on the road. Maybe three or four. We'll have two support vehicles. We'll have somebody with medical training and experience just in case anything was to go wrong. We're going to have communications and PR, as well as a general manager of the project who will be based in Chicago just in case anything occurs or anybody wants to contact our organization. We'll get in touch. But on the road, it should be three or four people with two support vehicles, and then I'll be biking. We'll also have some alternative bicycles for anyone that's a part of the team that wants to do this with me, just to get a good workout in. I know that Rachel, my sister, is going to be doing a lot of the biking with me, which I'm really excited about. That's basically what the team will look like on the road."

On his teammate's reaching out and potentially committing to the project:

"I've talked to one of my closest friends, Grayson Allen. I was just on the phone with him talking about the press conference yesterday. He's wrapped up, and a lot of my teammates now are wrapped up in NBA obligations and trying to get drafted. I am going to be stopping in Minnesota, so Amile Jefferson, who is on the Timberwolves, and Tyus [Jones], and also Tre [Jones], who is going to be coming in next year... I want to connect with them and try to get them out to one of these basketball clinics. Harry Giles, who is in Sacramento... We have fifty cities, so I try to compartmentalize all of these different places where we'll be going. But, if we go to Sacramento, then he is with the Kings and I want to connect with him, so I've been talking to him a little bit. I have the full support of my team and it feels so great. I'm very lucky, but it's also a testament to the type of player that Coach brings to Duke and that's what Duke's known for. It's great character and great basketball. I definitely have the support of the team. I'm unbelievably thankful for it. When we end in New York, I know that Grayson's obligations for summer league, if he does end up getting that opportunity, will be through, so we might end up being able to connect during the final fundraiser, which would be in New York roughly around July 22nd. That subject could change by a day or two in case there's weather or anything, but the team is involved and I have good support which is a blessing—it's great."

On his background in cycling:

"I will come out and say I am not a professional cyclist. I think we all are aware of that. I have gotten into it a lot this past semester. I hold the Duke mile time record for my sophomore year, which was a 5:05 and you end up making a list in the weight room which kind of feels good. I was planning initially on trying to possibly run, but then what I recognized in planning is that I wanted to be able to actually reach out and connect with more people, so utilizing a bike as a vehicle to actually accomplish connecting with the IDD community would just expedite that process and I'd be able to meet more individuals. I am ready to do this. I am not necessarily this lifelong, avid cyclist. I will tell you that when I was younger, in Chicago on Lakeshore drive, which is just a few blocks away, I would go out there in high school at night and just ride up and down the lake and put on my favorite music and just kind of envision—this is when I was trying to get to Duke Basketball... Biking has kind of always been a meditative practice for me and I remember distinctly I would go out on lakeshore drive and just envision, look at this beautiful Chicago skyline a few blocks away from home, and I would envision what I wanted to accomplish and what those goals are. So, to be able to get back out on the bike and especially when we go to Chicago, to be able to ride along the lake, and I wouldn't say 'full-circle,' because I still have a lot to accomplish in life, but it'll be a very cool moment."