

WYVERN PRIZE GIVING SPEECH

Good evening everyone,

I would like to start by thanking Mr German for giving me the honour of opening the new complex at Wyvern and for being a guest at your presentation evening.

It seems like it was only yesterday that I was a student at the school, and as I walked round the memories came flooding back, most of them good.

I remember being at my Wyvern prize giving. I received the Sports Colours that evening. I was given a tie and from then on I took pride in wearing that to school every day. It was something only a few others could wear. You should all be really proud of receiving an award this evening.

When I was asked if I would say a few words during this presentation evening I wanted to say something about the importance of making the most of the time you have as a student, because of the impact it will ultimately have on your life. This is not only in the short term but also throughout your future. I can compare my time at school with something I can relate to and hope you can too.

Being at school is like being a professional rugby player. I joined Harlequins Academy in 2004, which in many ways was like being a student at Wyvern. You start with basic skills and ability, and the environment is designed to get the best out of you over a period of two years. You follow a set program with imposed targets set by the coaching staff, just as your teachers work to a curriculum and challenge you by setting tests. The Director of Rugby is in overall charge of the training program, hiring staff, running the budget, developing the culture of the club and ultimately being held responsible for the success of the organisation, just as Mr German is at Wyvern.

When I joined the Harlequins Academy I was old enough to know how privileged I was to have the opportunity to potentially achieve my boyhood dream of becoming a professional rugby player. But I also knew that at the end of the day it was down to me. If I failed to commit myself and achieve the required standard, my opportunity would have been wasted. I would have been shown the door and I would have spent the rest of my life thinking WHAT IF.

You may not yet fully understand the importance of school and the benefits of setting yourself some personal goals so you can push yourselves to the limit and achieve your potential. But if you can remember that one thing from tonight's events and my speech, and act on it, then it will have been worth me attending.

On a different note I am obviously very disappointed that I and the rest of the England rugby team did not achieve our goal and progress further in the Rugby World Cup.

As I have said publicly, I feel that I, along with my teammates, let the supporters and the country down. It has been hard for me on a personal level to come to terms with what happened after all the hard work put in. But I won't dwell on what has happened. I will instead use the adversity to drive me on, get stronger and come back a better player. I will also remember the good memories I have of the World Cup; the emotion I felt standing on the pitch getting ready to play the opening game against Fiji, proudly wearing the red rose, going on to score two tries and picking up the Man of the Match award for my country.

I would like to close by saying the opportunities are there for you to achieve your potential, whether it be in sport, science, engineering, architecture or another chosen profession. The only thing standing in your way is how much effort you are prepared to invest in your future, and the desire you have to succeed.

The opportunity is there for you, so grab it with both hands.

Thank you