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Floyd Little Memorial Service

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Recommended Citation

Syverud, Kent, "Floyd Little Memorial Service" (2021). *Chancellor's Office (2004 - 2013)*. 229.
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Syracuse University

Remarks by Chancellor Kent Syverud
Delivered on March 27, 2021
Location: Hendricks Chapel
Remarks: Floyd Little Memorial Service

Good morning everyone, I'm Kent Syverud, and welcome to Syracuse University to this service to honor the memory of Floyd Little.

Floyd Little was a man who kept his promises.

An outstanding student and athlete in high school, Floyd could have gone to almost any college, including Notre Dame and West Point. He came to Syracuse because of a promise he made to Ernie Davis. And he kept that promise, doing so much for Syracuse as a student and across an amazing career in the NFL, in business, and as a mentor and leader at the University.

I bet that most of us watching this service today can remember vividly the first time we met Floyd Little up close. I ask each of you to remember that first time right now. Not the first time you saw him play. Think about the first time he talked to you, one on one. I remember that. For me, it was more than seven years ago, at a crowded athletic event in my very first month as Chancellor here. I know no one there as was feeling overwhelmed.

And then, Herm Frazier and he turned to me and said something like, "And by the way, I want you to meet Floyd Little." I immediately froze. I was meeting 44. I became once again the nine year old in 1965 who watched Floyd Little dominate on the field.

And now, here was Floyd Little, looking at me and shaking my hand and waiting for me to say something. I was particularly eloquent on that occasion. I stammered, and I said, I quote: "Um, um, um, tell me about yourself, Mr. Little." Think about it—that was kind of like going up to Joe Biden and saying "Tell me about yourself, Mr. Biden." The logical response is, "Well, duh, I'm President of the United States."

Floyd Little did not say, “Well, duh, I’m 44.” What he did say was how much he cared about “his guys,” the people and students of the football team, how hard they worked, how much they deserved our support. I unfroze a bit and proceeded to ask a second stupid question, which was “What was your favorite sports moment in college or the NFL?” I was dying here. Floyd chuckled and proceeded to tell me about how much he loved and was proud of his family, and much he loved and was proud of DeBorah. And then he reached out to a famous broadcaster who was standing six feet away and said, “C’mon over here so I can introduce you to my Chancellor.” Floyd Little, after my two tongue-tied minutes, was saying ‘MY Chancellor.’”

That brief conversation captures Floyd Little. Floyd Little was not about Floyd Little. Floyd Little was never about Floyd Little. Floyd Little was about other people—about lifting them up, bringing them in, making them believe in themselves. For a whole month I had been feeling like an impostor as Chancellor, with everybody expecting things from me, and then here was Floyd Little calling me his Chancellor. I felt 10 feet tall. Maybe, just maybe, I really could do this.

That is what Floyd Little did, over and over again, for so many of us. I watched Floyd at many events in the last seven years. Alumni events. Athletic events. On the sidelines and around the country. We talk a lot about inclusion at this University, and we should because we need inclusion in these polarized and occasionally hateful times. Floyd Little embodied inclusion. Radical inclusion. No matter where he was, if there was a person on the margins, alone and left out—whether a little kid or an old lady or anything in between, Floyd would find them out and talk with them, and listen to them, and then draw them in with others until suddenly that person was part of the team. Floyd Little believed in us, and so we could believe in ourselves.

This chapel today has 75 people in it, because that is the maximum number permitted here today by the State of New York. In normal times, this chapel seats 1,000 people. Just to be clear to all of you watching today, but for that law, Covid or no Covid, every seat in this chapel would be packed today. We spent much of the past two weeks fending off pleas from people all over the country to be permitted to be in this space today. They would be hanging from the balconies if we let them, damn the public health risk. And they would be here not because of Floyd Little’s

amazing career as an athlete, although they would honor it and remember it. They would be here because of Floyd Little's amazing life as a decent human being.

Floyd Little kept his promises. In my last conversation with him, when he was pretty sick, he ended it by making me promise to "Stick with it." I think he meant by that "it" what we had been talking about, which was the people and values he cared so much about, including at Syracuse. What could I say? Floyd Little was asking me to promise. I promised him I would stick with it.

Floyd Little kept his promises. Let's all honor him by keeping ours.

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