

Commencement Speech
By Katie Smith
December 18, 2022

Thank you to President Johnson and the Board of Trustees for this honor. And HELLO autumn graduates of the class of 2022! Congratulations. I am humbled to have the chance to talk with you as part of this significant milestone and celebration of your accomplishments. Today I'd like to ask you to play along with me as we reflect together on two things- what being a student at this great institution means to you and what is great about being an alumnus of The Ohio State University.

What was great about being a student?

- **Raise your hand if you have a mentor because of OSU**

Here I was, a top basketball recruit and a valedictorian of my high school class. Most would think I started my career ready to go without a care in the world. I had all of the doubts and worries that any new student has. I was coming from small-town Logan Ohio to The Ohio State University. As a student athlete- like all students- you are assigned an academic advisor. My advisors, Kate Riffe and Larry Romanoff, made all the difference. While I was well prepared athletically and academically- no one could take this on alone. They taught me new strategies and tools to meet the new challenges. And they were always counted on to be "truth tellers"- important when you could get caught up listening to the hype!

- **Raise your hand if your path to graduating was not a straight line - you were a nontraditional student**

So fun fact, I was convinced I would be a dentist like my father after my playing career ended at Ohio State. I was pre-med during my student-athlete days. I did pretty well but once my four years of playing ended- I had an opportunity to go pro right away and my degree remained a tad unfinished. So, I had to put it on hold. This university welcomed me back with open arms to finish my last semester 12 years later. My pro career was cruising right along, and I decided dentistry wasn't in the cards. So, there is always a path back to this great place with people who stand ready to meet you where you are and get you finished.

- **Raise your hand if you can picture your favorite spot on campus that brings you peace or happiness**

My favorite spot on campus is St. John Arena. The stories those bleachers could tell. The quiet of an empty gym- just me, a ball, and a basket still fills me with calm and joy. It matters because I was able to be more than I thought I could, be supported by screaming fans and even better teammates and coaches. It is my quintessential

buckeye experience. You need to connect with a place like that - it will keep you grounded to what matters and remind you that you are part of something bigger- that this Buckeye nation has your back.

So being an alum- one of the greatest experiences of my life.

- **Raise your hand if you have been traveling throughout the US or out of the country and heard someone yell O-H.**

I had the honor of representing the USA in three Olympics from 2000-2008. Didn't matter if it was Athens, Sydney, or Beijing- not a game went by without me hearing someone yelling OH from the crowd.

- But more than that - This is an alumni network that just keeps giving back

I started my 17 year professional basketball playing career in the heart of Buckeye country with the ABL's Columbus Quest. Two years and two championships later, I was injured and rehabbing my knee. The season was actually underway. I couldn't play and just finished a rehab session, so I was out shopping for Christmas gifts for my family. Lo and behold I get a call from a local television station asking me, "Do have some time to come to the station today for an interview? My response was "today? Can I come by another day?" - I had just left a rehab session and I was in sweats and a bit of a mess." They said, "You don't know?" to which I respond, "Know what?" "The league folded" was their response. Well- that was that. This career has been an adventure. And luckily my adventure included a smart GM and fellow Buckeye who reached out to me from the WNBA and brought me to Detroit where we locked up a couple more championships with the Detroit Shock. This is what i am talking about when I say- the Buckeye connection matters.

- **Stand up if you are now becoming a two-time alum. We want to show you some love**
- **Stand up if you are now becoming a three-time alum. Well check that out. Congratulations**

This university is an exceptional place of learning and discovery. You should always keep coming back. I did.

I went back to study medical dietetics towards the end of my playing career because I love learning and a couple of fantastic faculty and mentors helped me figure out how to pursue my interest in the coordinated grad program while still playing. Thanks Dr. Spees and Dr. Wolfe. I am a proud Master of Science alum because of them.

And so I end with a challenge to you. A legendary Buckeye, Phyllis Bailey, who made women's athletics a reality AND a priority at Ohio State and beyond, recently passed and is someone who meant a lot to me. She offered a challenge that I want to share with you. She said, "If you're a really good player on a team, you're not just looking out for yourself." Here's the deal- you have been educated at a fine institution and you are going to be successful. But if you are a Buckeye, you're not just looking out for yourself. As Phyllis said- it is about others- so be there for others now and into the future- make the difference- take the call- do what is required of being a Buckeye.

Thank you....Congratulations.....And Go Bucks