

Good morning to the Principal, Vice Principal, specially invited guests, staff, parents and of course, the graduating class of 2023. Today, I'd like to congratulate every one of my fellow Naparima brothers on not only completing CAPE, but doing so at Naparima College. Here the academic standards are high, the workload is rigorous, and any maths exam written by Mr Nazim is a thing straight from hell. I can't tell you how many times I've gone to question one on his exams, only to have to immediately turn the page. Nevertheless, persevering, despite such challenges, is an achievement that we should be proud of, and the fact that we have completed this portion of our lives is something which we ought to celebrate.

I implore you to recall our life here at Naparima College. From the very beginning, we had the high expectations of being a "Naps Man" thrust onto our shoulders and at first it was a challenge to bear the load.

I'm sure many of the guys from 1S would remember that after we had once again committed one of our many atrocities, a past student Sanjeev, came into class and shouted at us for being "the worst form ones ever". I can't remember what we ever did to warrant such a response, but I'll be honest, those words have stuck with me ever since. I mean, "the worst form ones", in the entire history of Naps? I must say, that's quite an achievement. Looking back, however, I don't think a student who was only at Naparima College for at most 7 years was really qualified to make such astounding claims. So, for credibility reasons, it's probably best to keep that accomplishment off the resume.

Ignoring the jokes, what I'm trying to say is that we weren't really Naps men at the start of our journey in this institution. Personally, I know that in form one my clothes were baggy, my

watch was loose on my wrist, and my shoes were a bit big. With time, however, we all grew into these uniforms, as hundreds of young men have done before us.

This school is not just a place but a machine that has moulded us into the men that we are today; a machine that has instilled within us the values of cooperation and perseverance. For example, while preparing for CSEC during the pandemic, oftentimes we called each other over Zoom or WhatsApp to cram - I mean study. At other points in time when we found that our peers were struggling, we turned online assessments into group activities.

Now the reason that I'm joking about academics is because excellence is the expectation here at Naparima College. We all know that. There's no need to go on and on about it. It's the reason that we passed for the school, or were able to transfer in, in the first place. Instead, what has made us not merely students that attend Naparima College, but Naps Men, are all the other experiences that we share. Whether it be the excitement of football games, limes outside of school, sports day or religiously skipping class only to inevitably be cramming it the night before the exam, these experiences have all shaped who we are today.

Upon entering form 6 at the tail end of the pandemic, instead of having the role of being a "Naps Man" again thrust onto our shoulders, we took our clothes off the hangers and adorned them with confidence and pride. That time when we returned to school, the uniform fit as though tailor-made.

A few days into the academic year, we soon learned that yes we had grown, but so too had the expectations. We were tasked with planning events, leading clubs, and maintaining a general sense of order and good behaviour within the school. To some extent, we were no

longer trying to be “Naps Men”, but instead, through our own actions, we were allowed to shape its definition as the younger students looked to us as their examples. Some would come to us seeking advice, others would just want to share their concerns.

Nevertheless, many of us, still feeling like boys ourselves, were suddenly handed, on a silver platter, the power to influence others. I remember having a chat with one of my friends who described how oddly scary it was to have a younger student come up to him and say that he wants to be just like him. My friend thought to himself in that instance, that being just like him is a terribly low bar to set. He thought to himself that no one should try to be just like him, but instead that everyone should strive to be quite a bit better. He viewed himself as just another person. That younger student, however, didn't see all the challenges that my friend had endured or all the mistakes that he had made. He simply saw the end result. He saw the list of accomplishments and admirable characteristics, but not the human being standing behind them.

The more and more I interact with people who are older than myself, the more I realise that we are all just people. We all have our own lofty dreams and terrible fears, our own strengths and weaknesses. We all make mistakes and have feelings of insecurity and inadequacy. Some of us react to these feelings well, others not so much. That doesn't include just you all but extends to your parents, the staff here, and all the other characters that we may meet in our lives. It is important then, that we stop for a moment and appreciate how incredibly lucky we are to have had the opportunity to be placed in an institution where we were nurtured and given the encouragement needed to grow. We are extremely fortunate to have been given the gift of expert guidance by excellent teachers, all in a safe environment.

For seven years of our lives, we could have been placed under the thumb of an administration that did nothing to foster our development. We could have had teachers who didn't care nor teach, or an environment which was polluted with the stench of crime. Instead, however, we had our second home, a safe haven, Naparima College.

Thus, I'd like to express towards the hard working principal, administration, teaching staff, librarians, office staff, and maintenance employees, the gratitude of all of the graduates here today. To the parents who have stood by us, please accept our inadequate thank yous for your constant sacrifices, care and support. To my fellow graduates, it's been seven years with ups and downs, laughs and frowns, but we made it to the end.

I'm sure, however, that for many, like myself, this isn't enough. Maybe next we pursue university or a job with some grande end goal in mind. I encourage you wholeheartedly.

Looking back, however, I feel compelled to remind you that it is not the first time that we adorned that white shirt and grey pants, or when we finally got our CSEC or CAPE results, that we treasure the most. It's all the little experiences that we had in between those moments, that we will forever cherish in our memories. Those are the things that make us Naps Men. It is not merely our successes and failures that make us Naps Men. It is the sleepless nights the passion at football games, the classes that we skip, the people that we skip with, and the comradery that we display. It is the path that we take that defines us as Naps Men.

But now as our paths begin to diverge I must ask you, in ten years time what will have defined you?

I thank you.