ROBERT K. KRAFT FIELD:
A MUCH-DESERVED TRIBUTE FOR THE MAN BEHIND THE NAME

Yesterday, Columbia University announced that Robert K. Kraft, Chairman and CEO of the Kraft Group, owner of the New England Patriots and 1963 graduate of Columbia College, has pledged $5 million to the University in support of Columbia’s intercollegiate athletics program.

Kraft’s gift, one of the largest ever to Columbia Athletics, will provide early leadership funding for The Columbia Campaign for Athletics: Achieving Excellence, a $100 million initiative. In recognition of Kraft’s gift, the playing field at Lawrence A. Wien Stadium at the Baker Field Athletics Complex has been named “Robert K. Kraft Field.”

President Lee C. Bollinger:
“Robert’s extraordinary gift is a great stride in the continued transformation of our athletics program. We are proud to have his name associated with the field at our stadium, and thank him for his remarkable support of Columbia University. It’s always especially wonderful to have a naming gift from a true friend.”

Bill Campbell ’62CC, Chair of the Trustees:
“Robert Kraft is a leader in every sense of the word. He is a guy who understands what it takes to win, and he believes in Columbia Athletics.”

Dr. M. Dianne Murphy, Director, Intercollegiate Athletics and Physical Education:
“Robert is dedicated to excellence in everything he does. We thank him for his commitment to our athletics program and our goal of achieving and sustaining excellence.”

Norries Wilson, The Patricia and Shepard Alexander Head Coach of Football:
“Robert’s generosity opens up a lot of opportunities for Columbia Athletics. His gift will help immensely in accomplishing Columbia Football’s goal of winning Ivy League championships. I thank Robert on behalf of our football program, and all Columbia teams.”

There are 40 names on the roster of past recipients for the Theodore Roosevelt Award, the NCAA’s highest honor. As the 2006 recipient, Robert Kraft’s name is near the top of the list.

“Robert Kraft,” it reads, “NE Patriots.”

That’s true enough. The nearest names to his are identified just as simply - “Paul Tagliabue, NFL” and “Sally Ride, astronaut.” But in identifying him as “NE Patriots,” it leaves out so much more.

When Columbia Athletics nominated Robert Kraft for the award, sought to have him honored as “a citizen of national reputation and outstanding accomplishment,” it cited not only his ownership of arguably pro football’s most successful franchise, but also his accomplishments as a major industrialist, as a benefactor to countless entities throughout New England, and as a man who has never forgotten the University where he spent four undergraduate years.

Kraft grew up in Brookline, Mass., a Boston suburb, and attended public schools there. He might have become a rabbi, but instead journeyed to New York to attend Columbia. He studied history and economics and
went out for the football team. He played on the freshman team his first year, and then went out for lightweight football, in which no player, whether a receiver or a tackle, could weigh more than 158 pounds.

Kraft thrived on Columbia’s varsity lightweights. He played running back, end and defensive back, becoming a starter by the first game of his sophomore season. He continued to start all season, in games against Army, Navy, Rutgers, Penn, Princeton and Cornell, seeing action on both offense and defense in each game.

His junior season, 1961, figured to be no different. He actually played 51 of a possible 60 minutes in the season opener against Cornell. But he was injured in the next game, against Penn, an injury that ended his college football career. He never again wore Columbia Blue on the playing field.

Kraft graduated from Columbia in 1963. He returned to Boston and attended Harvard Business School on a fellowship. He also married the former Myra Hiatt.

In 1972, he purchased Rand-Whitney and the same year founded International Forest Products, a trader of paper commodities that does business in more than 70 countries. He soon established The Kraft Group to serve as his family’s holding company.

Today, The Kraft Group’s holdings are concentrated in five different areas - the distribution of forest products, paper and packaging manufacturing, sports and entertainment, real estate development and private investing.

A lifelong fan of the New England Patriots, he took the first step in his pursuit of ownership of the club in 1985 when he purchased the underdeveloped land surrounding old Foxboro Stadium. In 1988, he bought the stadium itself, out of bankruptcy court. Then in 1994, offered a $75 million buyout of the stadium in order to void the contract and allow the team to be moved out of New England, he turned it down and invested $172 million to purchase the Patriots. Patriot fans showed their support for his move by acquiring season tickets in record numbers.

Their enthusiasm was well founded. In 2004, the Patriots became the second team in NFL history to win three Super Bowls in a four-year span and the seventh club to win consecutive Super Bowl championships. An active worker on many NFL committees - he chairs the Finance Committee - Kraft has been one of the keys to the development of the NFL as a major entertainment force. He has been recognized by national publications as Sports Executive of the Year and Sports Industrialist of the Year.

The Kraft family is one of New England’s most philanthropic families, donating millions of dollars in support of local charities and civic initiatives. He serves on the executive committee of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, a trustee of Boston College and trustee emeritus of Columbia.

A member of Hillel’s board of governors, he is largely responsible for the construction of the Robert K. Kraft Family Center for Jewish Student Life, which opened in 2000. Robert Kraft’s lead gift in 1993 launched the building campaign for the Center, which is across the street from Columbia’s main campus.

Robert and Myra Kraft have four sons, one of whom is a graduate of Columbia College.

―Dr. M. Dianne Murphy