

Motivational speaker at J.H.S.

Students call talk uplifting; showed type of success is real

Students and teachers alike raved about a recent motivational speaker that came to Jena High School.

"He is quite possibly the best I've ever heard," Principal Slick Joiner said about Hollis Conway, one of America's all-time best high jumpers.

Conway spoke to students a few weeks ago about the importance of dreaming big and the principles that allowed him to achieve his greatest dream. The Jena Giant Alumni Association paid for the speaker to address the school.

Hollis Conway has been one of the world's most dominating athletes. He has numerous awards and set many records. His 1991 jump of 7'10.5" still stands as the American Indoor Record some 17 years later.

He is a faithful husband, a father and an ordained minister. He is also the president of Overcoming Obstacles, Inc., a non-profit motivational speaking company. Hollis has authored two books: YES I CAN and GRASSHOPPER.

Born in Chicago, Illinois, Hollis is the baby of seven

children. His mom and dad often separated which caused them to move quite frequently. At the age of two, their family moved to Detroit, Michigan and at age nine, they moved to Shreveport, Louisiana. With so much instability at home, Hollis quickly found solace in the athletic arena.

He tried basketball and football but it was in the high jump that Hollis found his mark. While not being able to clear 5'6" as a freshman, he was just a junior varsity jumper. However, his remaining years in high school saw him go from that J.V. jumper to one of the best high jumpers in the United States.

He eventually went on to have a 16-year career and he is going down as one of the best high jumpers in all of history.

In his book, YES I CAN, Hollis relates his dream early in his life:

"As a young kid, I grew up with a lot of obstacles in my life. I was undersized, financially destitute and highly unpopular. Basically, I was skinny, broke and I didn't have a girlfriend.

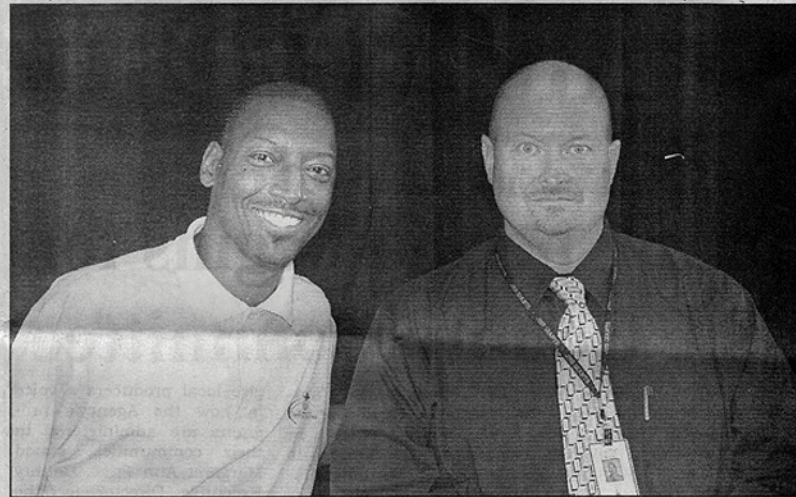
"It didn't seem like I had much going for me at all, but I did. I had a dream. I had a dream of one day representing my country in the Olympics. I wanted to stand on the awards stand, in my patriotic red, white and blue uniform and proudly watch as they put the official Olympic medal around my neck.

"I wanted to see the American Flag being raised and I wanted to hear our National Anthem being played for the entire world to hear. It was a beautiful dream that permeated my every thought.

"Nine years later my dream became a reality as I stood on the Olympic platform in Seoul, Korea, with my red, white and blue USA uniform on. I received a silver medal around my neck and I saw our flag raised to a place for the entire world to see.

"It was one of the most special times in my life because I realized that very few people in this world will ever stand before a stadium filled with thousands of fans and a televised audience of millions as an Olympic medalist.

"That moment reflected



Jena High Principal Slick Joiner, right, is shown with two-time Olympic Medalist Hollis Conway during his visit to the school recently. The motivational speaker was well received by the student body and was brought to the school by the Jena Giant Alumni Association. (See story.)

the exact dream that I had as a little boy and that night taught me an important lesson. Dreams can and do come true."

The inspirational true story of Hollis Conway spoke volumes to the students of Jena High School.

"Mr. Hollis Conway gave us a very motivational and uplifting speech about how everything is possible if we apply ourselves," said student Mason Roy. "His speech

told me that everything we need to succeed is within us. This speech really showed me that this type of success is real."

"Hollis Conway gave us a very good speech about how we can be whoever we want to be," said student Samantha Ford. "We just need to believe in ourselves and we need to actually try to do something about it. He told us that he was very non-athletic as a freshman in

high school but he decided he wanted to do something about it. He ended up being a world champion in high jump. Success is what you make it."

"Hollis Conway is a nationally known Olympic high jumper," said student Katie Bethard. "He talked about how to gain success and he also talked about how we could be whatever we want to be."

Teacher Betsy Warwick noted that Conway kept the student body's attention like she'd never seen.

"He was an excellent speaker and kept the students' attention with humorous stories of his childhood," she said. "He encouraged the students not to let their environment or negative people keep them from achieving their dreams."

"Mr. Conway explained that each person has a great potential and you only need to discover the area of your potential," she concluded.

Principal Joiner thanked Conway for his wonderful presentation, noting he felt confident it made a difference in the students' lives.

"And we also want to thank the Jena Giant Alumni Association for paying the cost to have him here," he said. "Every student I spoke with told me how much they enjoyed the program."

For more information about Hollis Conway, visit his website at www.hollisconway.com.