**Themes**

**Jim Thorpe –**

When it comes to all-around excellence in athletic endeavors, Jim Thorpe stands tall. In 1999 the Associated Press placed him third on its list of top athletes of the century, behind only Babe Ruth and Michael Jordan.

Thorpe excelled not in one sport, but in many. He made a name for himself in track and field, professional basketball and football, as well as Major League Baseball, persevering despite racism and personal difficulty.

Though sports came easy for Thorpe, life did not. James Francis Thorpe was born a twin, but lost his brother to pneumonia when he was 9 years old. His mother died of childbirth complications just two years later. His father passed away after a hunting accident when Thorpe was 16 and attending the Carlisle Indian Industrial School.

Thorpe was raised in the Sac and Fox nation in Oklahoma. Despite the hardships of his youth, he lived up to his native name, Wa-Tho-Huk, translated as "Bright Path."

His brilliant athletic career began at the Carlisle School. Though football was his favorite sport—earning him All-American honors in 1911 and 1912—he did not stop there. He competed in baseball, lacrosse, track and field, and even ballroom dancing, winning the 1912 intercollegiate ballroom dancing championship.

Indeed, 1912 was a big year for Thorpe. He became famous overnight with his outstanding performance at the Stockholm Olympics, where he won the gold medal for both the decathlon and pentathlon. Reportedly, as King Gustav of Sweden awarded Thorpe his medals, he said “You, sir, are the greatest athlete in the world.”

Alas, in 1913, Thorpe’s medals were stripped from him when the committee discovered he had played minor league baseball prior to competing in the Olympics, therefore violating the amateur regulations. After vigorous opposition to this ruling, in 1983 Thorpe’s medals, and his name, were reinstated in the record books.

Thorpe went on to play Major League Baseball, professional football, and basketball, where he led an all-American Indian team. He played for various MLB teams and finished his career with a .252 batting average, 91 runs scored and 82 runs batted in. Likewise Thorpe played for six different NFL teams. He even coached one of his teams, the Canton Bulldogs, while still a player. Thorpe’s talent did not go unnoticed—he was selected to the first All-NFL team in 1923.

The sheer excellence with which Thorpe performed every sport he ever competed in is an inspiration to many. Undoubtedly, Jim Thorpe is one of the greatest athletes this world has ever seen.

**Team Hoyt –**

The doctors told Dick Hoyt that his infant son Rick should be institutionalized. There was no hope, they said, of Rick being anything more than a “vegetable.”

Four decades later, Rick and Dick Hoyt have completed more than 70 marathons, 250 triathlons and hundreds of other events as a father-son team. Rick, whose father was told he was incapable of intellectual activity, graduated from Boston University in 1993. This remarkable pair’s devotion to each other and to their goals has enabled them both to accomplish things that neither would have achieved alone.

During Rick's birth in 1962, the umbilical cord wrapped around his neck, cutting off oxygen to his brain. Diagnosed as a spastic quadriplegic, Rick has cerebral palsy. Yet despite the doctors' grim prognosis when Rick was born, Dick and his wife Judy were determined to raise him at home.

Though Rick could not speak, his parents knew that he was as intelligent as his siblings—and they were eager to give him a voice. With now-familiar perseverance, Dick and Judy raised $5,000 through bake sales and dinner dances and then convinced a group of engineers from Tufts University to build a "communicator" for their son. By tapping a switch with the side of his head, Rick selects letters to form words and sentences. He revealed his athletic leanings with his first words, “Go, Bruins!”

At age 13, Rick finally was admitted to public school. Soon afterward, he told his father he wanted to participate in a five-mile benefit run for a local lacrosse player who had been paralyzed in an accident. Dick was not a runner, but he agreed to push Rick through the race course in his wheelchair. That’s when a surprising thing happened. During the run, Rick felt as though he wasn't handicapped anymore—he was simply one of the runners. This experience deeply affected Dick, and he committed to running an increasing number of events with his son so that Rick could have this feeling as often as possible.

"Team Hoyt" began competing in earnest in the late 1970s. At first, other competitors often treated them as outsiders and even avoided them. But gradually, what began as a way for Rick Hoyt to experience inclusion and equality broadened in its purpose. Running together became a way to send a message that, as Rick said, "everybody should be included in everyday life."

The duo's first Boston Marathon in 1981 yielded a finish in the top quarter of the field, and shortly thereafter, attitudes began to change.

"In the beginning no one would come up to me," recalled Rick. Now, he says, "many athletes will come up to me before the race or triathlon to wish me luck."

Dick has run, ridden and swum literally thousands of miles to be with and support his son. Their athletic pursuits have enriched Rick’s life and had a tangible benefit for Dick’s life as well: After a mild heart attack, Dick's doctors told him he might have died 15 years earlier if he weren't in such good shape.

Team Hoyt's total commitment to each other and to what they do ensures that they challenge themselves constantly. In addition to their athletic events, the Hoyts tour the country to speak about their experiences. They also have established the Hoyt Foundation, which seeks to help integrate young people with disabilities into everyday activities so they may live fruitful and productive lives.

The 2013 Boston Marathon was the 31st time the Hoyts have run the race, and it was going to be their last. Just a few days before the marathon, a bronze statue of the Hoyts, titled “Yes You Can!”, was unveiled near the starting line. After the race was disrupted by the Boston Marathon bombings, the Hoyts vowed to come back one more time, in 2014, because nothing will stop them from achieving their dreams—together.

**Liz Murray –**

Liz Murray grew up in the Bronx, New York City, with drug-addicted parents who sometimes sold household items in order to get their fix. As a child, Murray hated school because when she did go, she was teased as an oddball—after all, she had no one at home to make sure she showered or got up on time.

As Murray grew older, her parents lost their apartment. Her mother, who suffered from AIDS, became increasingly ill and was hospitalized, while her father struggled from shelter to shelter. Rather than submit to the dehumanization and sadness that had characterized her brief experience in foster care, Murray chose to fend for herself. She slept on friends' couches or floors at odd hours, camped outside or rode the subway all night.

When Murray was 16, her mother died. Murray felt that event as "a slap in the face" that caused her to question where her life was going. With an eighth-grade education, Murray decided that, as she said, "Life rewards action. I was going to go out there and… have action in my life every day instead of this stagnant behavior that I had been partaking in for so long."

After Murray was admitted to an alternative high school, the Humanities Preparatory Academy, she took a double course load and completed high school in only two years. The school took its top 10 students, including Murray, on a trip to Boston, where the group walked through Harvard Yard.

"It's not as though I had some sort of epiphany at the moment… It was more that I got jealous of how these students had so much opportunity, and I felt that I'd had very little. And so then I thought, ‘Well, what's the difference between me and anyone here?’ And I filled in all the gaps."

Her grades earned Murray a scholarship from the New York Times. She applied and was admitted to Harvard, and graduated in 2009, after taking a sabbatical to care for her father, who also passed away due to AIDS.

Along the way, Murray began to tell her story through writing and public speaking. Her tale was adapted by Lifetime Television in the 2003 film "Homeless to Harvard: the Liz Murray Story." She is also an avid writer whose best-selling memoir, "Breaking Night," was published in 2010. Now a member of the Washington Speakers' Bureau, Murray has found she has "a knack for" sharing her insights with audiences across the country, and she has founded a company, Manifest Living, which works to empower adults to create extraordinary things in their lives.

In all she does, Murray embodies ambition—not only to achieve material goals and accomplishments, but more importantly, to transcend circumstances and achieve the very best of which one is capable.

**Albert Einstein –**

Albert Einstein was born in 1879 at Ulm, Württemberg, Germany. When Einstein was five, his father showed him a pocket compass, and Einstein realized that something in "empty" space acted upon the needle; he would later describe the experience as one of the most revelatory of his life. As a child, though he built models and mechanical devices for fun, he was considered a slow learner, possibly due to dyslexia, simple shyness or the significantly unusual structure of his brain (as seen following his death). He later credited his development of the theory of relativity to this slowness, saying that by pondering space and time later than most children, he was able to apply a more developed intellect.

Einstein began to learn mathematics at about age 12. There is a recurring rumor that he failed mathematics later in his education, but this is untrue; a change in the way grades were assigned caused confusion years later.

His failure of the liberal arts portion of the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule (Federal Swiss Polytechnic University, in Zurich) entrance exam the following year was a setback; he was sent by his family to Aarau, Switzerland, to finish secondary school, and received his diploma in 1896. In 1900, he earned a teaching diploma at the Swiss Polytechnic University and became a Swiss citizen in 1901.

Upon graduation, Einstein could not find a teaching post and instead started to work at the Swiss patent office. He judged the worth of inventors' patent applications for devices that required knowledge of physics to understand. He obtained his doctorate after submitting his thesis, "On a new determination of molecular dimensions," in 1905.

That same year, he wrote four articles that provided the foundation of modern physics, despite the fact that he had little scientific literature to refer to and few scientific colleagues with whom to discuss his theories. Most physicists agree that three of those papers (on Brownian motion, the photoelectric effect and special relativity) were worthy of a Nobel Prize. Only the paper on the photoelectric effect would win, in 1921.

In December 1932, after learning he was a target of the Nazi party, Einstein moved to the United States and accepted a position at the newly formed Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, New Jersey, where he remained for the rest of his career. In 1940 he became a U.S. citizen. In 1946 he helped to form the Emergency Committee of Atomic Scientists, which worked to control the atom bomb. He was a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and actively campaigned for civil rights for African Americans.

Albert Einstein was much respected for his kind and friendly demeanor rooted in his pacifism. He occasionally had a playful sense of humor, and enjoyed playing the violin and sailing. He was also the stereotypical "absent-minded professor"—he was often forgetful of everyday items, such as keys, and would focus so intently on solving physics problems that he would often become oblivious to his surroundings.

At age 76, he suffered an abdominal aortic aneurysm while preparing to give a speech. He refused surgery, stating, “It is tasteless to prolong life artificially. I have done my share, it is time to go. I will do it elegantly.” He died, in Princeton, early the next morning, on April 18, 1955.

**Marlon Shirley –**

Marlon Shirley saw his fair share of struggles as a young boy, living with his mother who was gone a lot and moved frequently to keep trouble from catching up with her. Shirley was five years old when, living with other children on the streets of Las Vegas, he was picked up by social services. He was placed at an orphanage where he began the "pinball life of an institutional orphan.”

His life in the children’s home would literally leave a lasting mark. In 1984, the caretaker of the orphanage was letting the kids jump on and off a riding lawnmower while he mowed the lawn around the facility. Shirley slipped, and the lawnmower ran over his leg. Shirley later woke up with an amputation above the ankle, his foot gone forever.

Shirley bounced around to various foster homes over the years until he was adopted by a family from Utah in 1987. He took the Shirleys’ last name and feels blessed to have been found by them.

Shirley struggled through high school, trying to overcome the habits and tendencies of his past—of simply trying to survive. Midway through his senior year in 1997, close to flunking out and humiliated, Shirley decided he had had enough. Determined to do something with his life, he signed up to participate in the Simplot Games in Idaho, the largest open high school indoor track meet west of the Mississippi. He hoped to be offered a college scholarship, but the odds were against him. Shirley had little track experience. Moreover, he was hobbling on crutches, because he had fractured a bone in his leg while dunking a basketball a few weeks earlier.

Something in Shirley drove him to put all his effort into the track meet. He entered the high jump competition, where he hopped over on his good leg and dove headfirst over the bar. He cleared 6’6”, a height which would set a Paralympic world record. A month later, Shirley competed in the Disabled Sports USA track meet in California, where he left $13,000 richer. Later in high school he had more surgeries and a second, higher amputation to the same leg following a football injury.

Despite having an upbringing that might have broken many people, Shirley has not only found a way to prevail, but has found the drive to become a world-class athlete. He owns two world records, in the 100-meter dash and the long jump. In 2000, at the Paralympic Games in Sydney he won the 100m dash and took silver in the high jump. He was the first and only lower leg amputee to break the 11-second mark in the 100m dash, setting a time of 10.91 seconds in 2007.

At the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Marlon Shirley won the Paralympic 100-meter gold medal for the second time. He has been called “the world’s fastest amputee.”

Shirley said, "It's something I train for every single day. It's almost just like an automatic movement of my body springing down the track. We all have our own type of disabilities—mine just happens to be physical, and you can see it very easily when I run. But you can't tell it by the time I get done racing."

Shirley's prosthetic foot is made of carbon fiber titanium, materials developed in the aerospace industry. He has tested the limits of what a prosthetic foot can do—and the limits of the human spirit. Most importantly, Shirley never allowed his physical difference to limit his accomplishments.

"I remember running around on crutches just like I'd run around if I had another foot," he said. "I definitely never looked at myself any differently than anyone else."

That determination was tried in 2008, when he headed to the Beijing Paralympics following a year marred by knee infections and surgeries. He took to the track for the 100m finals, determined to defend his gold-medal title. But midway down the track, his Achilles tendon tore, and he fell to the ground in agony. Refusing to leave the race uncompleted, Shirley rose and finished the race, crossing the finish line to the roar of a cheering crowd, standing unified in recognition of Shirley as an astonishing champion.

Today, as a 10-time World Champion and Paralympic champion, Shirley is a spokesperson for the Paralympic Movement and other sponsors. He is also a motivational speaker, bringing to others his inspirational message that there is nothing we cannot achieve—provided we have the determination and the belief in ourselves to overcome our challenges.

**Softball –**

Though Western Oregon senior Sara Tucholsky often dreamed of what it would be like to hit her first home run, she never imagined it would end with the opposing team carrying her around the bases. In fact, her home run almost didn’t become a reality, except for the sportsmanship of Central Washington players Mallory Holtman and Liz Wallace.

Sara’s home run came in the second inning of the second game of a double header between the two teams. At stake that weekend was a bid to the NCAA's Division II playoffs. Central Washington needed to win the second game to keep its postseason dreams alive.

When Sara hit her long-awaited home run, players on second and third both ran home, whooping in celebration. Sara, in her excitement, over-ran first base. But when she turned quickly to go back, her right knee gave out. Sara went down in agony just a few feet from first base.

Sara was clearly injured and unable to walk on her own. Her coaches and teammates debated what to do. If Western Oregon trainers, coaches or players helped her up, she would be out. If they substituted a pinch-runner, her home run would be counted as a two-run single. Either way, Sara would lose the only home run of her career.

Central Washington player Mallory Holtman was also a senior—and her school’s career leader in home runs. After four years, she knew the rules of the game and quickly realized there was just one way for Sara’s home run to count.

“Excuse me,” Mallory interrupted the debating umpires and coaches. “Would it be OK if we carried her around and she touched each bag?”

The surprised officials agreed. Mallory and teammate Liz Wallace promptly picked Sara up, gingerly letting her left foot down to touch each of the bases to get her home run.

This act of sportsmanship contributed to Central’s loss. Still, there were no regrets or angry words from Mallory’s teammates. They all agreed—helping the opponent was simply the right thing to do. And the crowd—which had heckled Sara for her diminutive size when she stepped up to bat—agreed, too. When the threesome arrived at home plate, they were greeted with a standing ovation, creating a memory no one at that day’s game will ever forget.