

An athlete without limits brings story of inspiration to Danbury wrestlers

By Richard Gregory Updated 10:50 pm, Monday, January 9, 2017

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Motivational speaker Dave Stevens with members of the Danbury Youth Wrestling Association at the conclusion of his presentation at the Danbury High School auditorium Jan. 9, 2017. Stevens was able to play ... [more](#)

DANBURY — It may sound strange, but as **Dave Stevens** pointed out, being a wrestler with no legs has its advantages.

“The advantage that I realized is that, I know how to wrestle guys with legs — I call you guys ‘Leggies’ — but you guys don’t know how to wrestle a guy without legs,” Stevens explained to an audience of about 300, including many local youth and high school wrestlers, at the **Danbury High School** auditorium Monday night. “So the moves I’m going to do to you, I know what to do, but when you see me on the mat for the first time, you realize you don’t know what the heck you’re going to do.”

These days, the 50-year-old Stevens is a motivational speaker who has told his remarkable story to captive audiences from youth organizations to professional sports teams. Check out his website at DavesImpossibleDream.com. He was invited to speak by the **Danbury Youth Wrestling Association** and the Danbury High School wrestling team.

And what a story he had to tell.

Stevens was born without legs, the unfortunate result of his birth mother having used the morning-sickness drug Thalidomide, which has since been linked to all sorts of birth defects. The fact that Stevens survived at all was itself a miracle, and his entire life has been one against-all-odds story after another.

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Without legs — not even artificial ones — a three-foot-tall Stevens wrestled and played football and baseball in high school in Arizona and went on to play college football at **Augsburg College** in Minnesota. From the waist up, he has the body of someone who's roughly six feet tall. He uses his muscular arms and shoulders to run and move around.

A nose guard on the football field, he tried out for the NFL's **Dallas Cowboys**, and also had tryouts with the 1984 U.S. Olympic baseball team and two **Major League Baseball** teams — the **Cincinnati Reds** and **Minnesota Twins** — before playing briefly with the minor-league St. Paul Saints in 1996. He also worked for 20 years as a sports reporter at ESPN. He now plays football with the guys at the Wounded Warrior Project, occasionally works out with pro baseball teams and has recently taken up sled hockey.

To put it simply, Stevens has accomplished more as an athlete without legs than most people do with legs.

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"As a kid, I didn't know any different than the way I was, so it didn't really hold me back," said Stevens, who was put up for adoption by his birth mother right after he was born and raised by his adoptive parents. "My parents encouraged me. They really taught me and instilled in me that I could do anything that I wanted to do."

That kind of love and support helped Stevens muster the courage to pick up the ball and run with it — literally and figuratively speaking — despite what would appear to be a debilitating condition.

"I'm not a hero, I'm not anybody special, I'm just me. And that's how I've tried to live my life," Stevens said. "We all have this inside of us."

His message certainly resonated with the young wrestlers in the audience.

"To see him and all his great accomplishments, it's really inspiring to go out and do the same," said Danbury High wrestler **Peterson Souza**. "The lesson he gave to us is that you can't really judge a book by its cover."

Or judge an athlete by his physical attributes.