

# Olympic champion shares with Sisters High School students

By **Charlie Kanzig**  
Correspondent

What do you do as an encore when you are considered the world's greatest athlete and own two Olympic gold medals, a world record, and numerous other titles?

For Ashton Eaton, sharing with young people what he has learned through his athletic career is part of his "second act." Eaton dropped by Sisters High School on Friday, May 26, for an informal talk with about 40 students about striving for improvement through working toward a goal or idea.

"You don't have to achieve the goal to find success," he said, after drawing an illustration on the board while explaining his philosophy. He drew a triangle with the top point being the goal he was chasing. The base of the triangle represented the loads of trial and error along the way while continually working toward the goal.

The soft-spoken Eaton, who grew up in Central Oregon and attended Mountain View High School before starring at the University of Oregon and going on to Olympic glory, told a story about how as a seven- or eight-year-old playing outside his La Pine home he used a pair of sticks to measure how far he could jump. He would jump from one stick to the other, ever increasing the distance between the two until he could no longer improve. His long jumping career may have started that day — he has a lifetime best of just over 27 feet — but he uses the story to illustrate the notion

of continual self-improvement through analysis, failure, observation, belief in self, and determination.

The visit was arranged by Sisters Athletic Club's Tate Metcalf, who coached Eaton in high school and remains a close friend. Eaton and his wife, Brianne Theisen-Eaton, a bronze Olympic medalist for Canada in the heptathlon, are in the first year of their retirement from track and field.

Eaton offered more stories from his youth.

"I also loved the Ninja Turtles and wanted to be one, and one day my mother suggested I try martial arts," he said. "I remember the instructor suggested I try for a black belt, which is one of my earliest memories of someone offering me a goal.

"But with my goals, I never said 'I am going to do that for sure.' I simply always said I was going to try, including when it came to making the Olympics."

Another important piece to goal-setting for Eaton is telling others rather than keeping them to yourself.

"As far as school goes, you are not here for this place, this place is here for you," he said. "You have the keys to the building ... you have the right to go to teachers, parents, coaches and ask 'I am trying to do this, but how do I get there?'"

"You belong in the driver's seat," he said.

When asked about the mental aspect of his athletic career in competition Eaton said he ultimately found that actually imagining worst-case scenarios helped him cope with times when things

didn't go to plan. In the 10-event decathlon, a poor performance in one event can affect what happens in the following events either positively or negatively, depending on how you cope with the situation, he explained.

He also explained that self-reflection — "what can I change to make that better?" — was key, whether he won or lost.

He remembers fondly that being in the dining hall at the Olympics with athletes from throughout the world and from all political and religious backgrounds, made him see how he wishes the world could be.

"That's really the coolest part," he said. "For two weeks, people are there from everywhere and for those two weeks, it's all good. That's why the Olympics are so great."

One student asked how he dealt with other athletes trying to intimidate him in competition.

"I can't really do anything about the other competitors, but it does help me to see them as people just like me," he said.

As to training, his advice was to listen to your body because it is easy to think that more is better.

"You have to be smart and know what your body is telling you," he said.

Following his presentation, Eaton remained for pictures and small talk:



PHOTO BY CHARLIE KANZIG

Olympic decathlon champion Ashton Eaton talked with Sisters High School students about the pursuit of goals last week.

the world's greatest athlete taking time with three dozen teenagers, inspiring them toward their own dreams.



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