

Overcoming Adversity

Aimee Mullins never let her disability define her

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BETHLEHEM — Aimee Mullins exudes confidence.

When Mullins, a successful model and actress who attended Georgetown University after graduating from Parkland High School in 1993, was asked a question, she responded with an intelligent answer while looking her target square in the eye.

During her speech to 100 basketball all-stars, their friends and families and a host of others at last week's Via All-Star Basketball Banquet at Freedom High School, Mullins told stories of her past, inspired with her words and showed how far someone can go when they choose to overcome.

And she did it all like a seasoned veteran.

But she wasn't always so sure of herself.

Like most people, her teenage years weren't the smoothest and, also like most people, things didn't always go according to plan.

"Absolutely," said Mullins when asked if she ever had doubts in herself. "Puberty for sure. Wasn't everybody? You will not find even the friends you thought were beautiful and popular, everybody has that thing that they wish were different. The trick is at what point are you going to decide that so-called disability is actually some gem that you have to figure out what it was given to you.

"I had to learn much, much, much younger than most women do that I had to accept myself and decide that I was going to celebrate what it was and find my own beauty and find my own strength."

Mullins did that from the beginning.

Born without a fibula in each leg, known as fibular hemimelia, Mullins had both of her legs amputated below the knee on her first birthday. She's been overcoming it ever since, highlighted athletically with Paralympic records in the 100-meter dash and long jump in Atlanta in 1996.

"Whatever your disability is doesn't define you as a person," Mullins told the crowd that included players from all six public schools in Monroe County and Notre Dame of East Stroudsburg. "Sure it shapes us, but it doesn't define who you are. I wasn't given any special power to overcome any adversity. I wasn't born with courage because I lost both legs below the knee. I have the same power that all you have.

"Always choose to live in possibility."

She backed that line of thinking up with a story.

Mullins entered this world several weeks after her due date. Because her mother's prenatal obstetrician was on vacation another doctor delivered her and was forced to tell her parents that she was missing her fibulas.

Just a few years ago, when Mullins was at a Wegmans in Allentown, a man approached her.



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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Aimee Mullins, a Parkland High School graduate, was born without a fibula in either leg.

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“Well, if it isn’t Aimee Mullins,” the man said.

“I’m sorry sir, do I know you? I don’t remember ever meeting you,” Mullins replied.

“Of course you wouldn’t remember me,” the man said. “The last time we met I was delivering you from your mother.”

The man was the same doctor who had delivered Mullins in 1976.

“He had to give this prognosis to my parents that I would never walk and he said, ‘You’ve been making a liar out of me ever since,’” Mullins said. “In fact he told me that he kept, whether it was second-grade spelling bees to marching in the Allentown Halloween Parade with the girl scouts to my being on an undefeated softball team to my scholarship to college, this whole scrapbook and he uses it now as part of his class and he calls it the X-Factor, the potential of the human will.”