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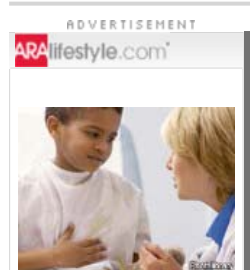
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Track, speedskating legends have message for FdL elementary school students

BY RUSSELL PLUMMER • THE REPORTER | MARCH 26, 2009

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More than 1,000 Fond du Lac students chanted "USA" Wednesday afternoon as two Olympians ran hand in hand into the Riverside Elementary School gymnasium.



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Casey FitzRandolph, a three-time Olympic speed skater and 2002 gold medalist in the 500 meters, and Suzy Favor Hamilton, a three-time Olympian and holder of seven U.S. championships and nine NCAA running titles, were greeted by elementary students' gazes and cheers stemming from teachers, parents and even the future Fond du Lac school superintendent, James Sebert.

A short video informed the kids about the Olympians' past, but the athletes quickly turned attention to a future of healthy living for students from Riverside, Rosenow, Roberts, Parkside, Chegwin, Lakeshore and Pier elementary schools.

"Casey and I are here to help inspire young people to eat healthier, to get out and start moving," Favor Hamilton said. "The whole program is about 'Movin' and Munchin' Schools.' You eat the right foods, you get out and do activity and you are not in front of the TV playing video games the whole time."

Favor Hamilton added that she wants to instill confidence in the children she meets throughout Wisconsin. She and FitzRandolph travel the state with the Department of Public Instruction program sponsored by the Wisconsin Education Association Trust (a not-for-profit health insurer for public school employees).

"Suzy and I are huge believers in living a healthy, active lifestyle," FitzRandolph said. "Movin' and Munchin'" is not about going to the Olympics or winning a gold medal. It's simply about being healthy throughout your life. We believe the time to set those standards is at a very young age, school kids. ... It was an easy sell when we were asked to be a part of it."

FitzRandolph said he remembers the impact some speakers had on him when he was younger.

"Are we going to get to every kid every time we do this? I think the answer to that is probably not," FitzRandolph said. "If we can make a difference in some, then, from my perspective, it is worth it."

"With the economy the way it is, running is one of the easiest sports," Favor Hamilton said. "You don't need the most fabulous running shoes. You can go out with bare feet and run on the grass."

"The wonderful thing about track is it's for everybody. ... Track and field has the most participants of any sport in high school."



Former Olympian and University of Wisconsin track legend Suzy Favor Hamilton officiates a relay race Wednesday at Riverside Elementary School. (The Reporter photo by Patrick Flood)

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Olympic gold medal speedskater Casey FitzRandolph talks with students during Wednesday's presentation. (The Reporter photo by Patrick Flood)

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FitzRandolph said a Google search can point kids to speed skating clubs throughout Wisconsin. His career before winning a gold medal began with donning pads and executing slap shots.

"A lot of speed skaters start out as hockey players," FitzRandolph said. "On the girls side, they probably start as figure skaters. They decide they want to get out on the ice, race around and see how fast they can go."

Fred Evert, chief executive officer of WEA Trust, said Wisconsin is one of the largest "Movin' and Munchin'" states. When the WEA began sponsoring the events three years ago, there were 34 Wisconsin schools involved, he said.

"There are now 170 schools involved, some 40,000 children and 15,000 parents and teachers." Evert said.

He noted the events are an effort to stem childhood obesity and diabetes that might become expensive chronic illnesses in the future.

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