



## Hockey and Hoops Heroes Elicit Big Hoorah

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Special to [epilepsyfoundation.org](http://epilepsyfoundation.org)

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Most kids would agree that a special dinner complete with all-you-can eat sundae bar is a pretty good start to a trip. But how many can say that they met two sports heroes in one night?

Young people from 25 states gathered in Washington, D.C., tonight for *Kids Speak Up!*, the Epilepsy Foundation's annual advocacy event for kids. While parents and other adults got an epilepsy research update in an adjacent room, the kids enjoyed a visit from Olympic hockey medalist Chanda Gunn and Harlem Wizards basketball star "Mighty Mike" Simmel.

### "Mighty Mike" Simmel, Harlem Wizards Basketball Player

After working up a sweat and igniting wistful yet ambitious gleams in several kids' eyes, Mike talked about his job as a Harlem Wizards performer and his life as a person who also has epilepsy. Mike, whom the Wizards' president Todd Davis said "is one of the most gifted players on our roster," talked to the kids about how his father gave him a basketball when he was 7. Soon, he was dribbling a ball everywhere he went, from school to the supermarket even to walking the dog. Mike used the sport as a mechanism for dealing with the epilepsy-related challenges he was experiencing like poor memory, tiredness and grand mal seizures. Instead of turning to the typical teen anodynes of drugs and alcohol, Mike channeled his energy into basketball and worked closely with his doctor to find the best treatment option.

Mighty Mike had some recommendations for the young people about hobbies, treatment and how to learn from others. First, he encouraged the kids to find an interest, "whether it's art, schoolwork, sports or something else," and use that as a positive outlet. Second, "have a great relationship with your doctor." Firsthand experience building his own doctor-patient relationship helped Mike weather a 108 degree fever without a seizure, since he had worked closely with his doctor to find the best possible medications. And "listen to parents" and other older people, since they have overcome challenges, although maybe different ones than having epilepsy, at the same stage of life.

"The way you face adversity... is a measure of the person you're going to become," said Mike. "You can be anything you want in this world if you put your mind to it. All of you have potential," he continued encouragingly. Fielding a question from Ian Moore, a seven year old from Baltimore, about what to do when medications make one tired, Mike suggested getting active. "We have to get him active," Mike suggested to the crowd, gathering a circle of about a dozen kids for a game of catch. Threading the ball around his waist, through his legs and over his back, Mighty Mike tossed, bumped and floated the ball to each child throughout the game.

Then, Christopher McDowell stepped up for a series of stunts Mighty Mike asserted they had been practicing... for five minutes. The tall teen showed remarkable poise as he mimicked the Wizard's ball handling, finishing off by holding a rapidly twirling basketball on the tip of a ballpoint pen. Each of these young people *can* do anything they try, from advocacy to Olympic medal modeling to advanced ball handling. And two famous athletes shared their evening and showed the young people a real path by sharing their common experiences with epilepsy.



Harlem Wizards Star "Mighty Mike" Simmel helps Christopher McDowell balance a twirling basketball on the tip of a pen