

# Beating the Odds tackles self worth

By AMANDA CLEGG

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Like good quarterbacks, Irving Elementary School sixth-graders Michael Miagar and Levi Covey got the game plan down.

“Never give up your dream,” Levi said.

“You can never not do something,” Michael said.

A Beating the Odds Foundation’s Quarterbacks of Life assembly offered a dream-and-achieve huddle to Altoona Area School District fourth- through sixth-graders Wednesday morning inside the fieldhouse.

About 1,700 students and 100 teachers are participating in the Quarterbacks of Life mentoring program this school year.

Highmark Healthy High 5 School Challenge grant, First Commonwealth Bank and the Pepsi Bottling Group funded the program designed to help teachers show students how to live

## Quarterbacks of Life mentoring program encourages elementary students to believe in themselves

up to their potential.

Pittsburgh Steeler Rocky Bleier, recording artist and former NBA star Thurl Bailey, Southwest Airlines pilot Kim Cooper and Pittsburgh Passion owner Teresa Conn shared their stories of perseverance.

“Stories are very important for us,” Bleier said. “We all have stories.”

Bleier shared his story of getting wounded in the Vietnam War and then going on to four Super Bowl wins.

He said when he was wounded he relied on inspirational stories to persevere.

“I thought if they could do it, I could get out of this fox hole,” he said.

He said self perception is

part of the battle.

Bleier always wanted the ability to dunk a basketball, but height was an obstacle, he said. Not so with 7-foot-tall Bailey.

“At times this was all I had,” he said of a basketball.

Bailey led the students through an exercise to show them how a vision can lead to an accomplishment. He asked the audience to sit up with their hands out and whenever his right hand crossed over his left he asked them to clap.

“Teamwork happens when everybody’s on the same page,” he said.

The first time the audience was a bit out of sync, but with practice they got better. Then Bailey threw

in a couple fake outs to show how life can do the same.

Bailey said each of the stories the students heard showed dreams are attainable.

When he was in seventh grade he had the height — 6-foot, 4-inches — but he did not make the basketball team, he said.

He said when he saw basketball legend Dr. J on television he found his passion for the game.

Bailey went on to become a first-round draft pick in 1983 for the Utah Jazz, according to [www.nba.com](http://www.nba.com). He played more than eight seasons with the Jazz, the site stated.

“I’m excited to be here because I know there is a lot of you who have dreams and goals,” he said. “You have a lot of help in this room to achieve those dreams.”

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