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# COMMUNITY

## \* Esteem Team's Njoku aims to inspire youth

By Stephanie Thiessen  
 CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Yes on the ball, legs shoulder-width apart, three students each tried their hardest to dribble a basketball with skill, standing next to a man who dwarfed them in his shadow.

It's not every day you get to play a sport with a six-foot-nine professional giving you tips along the way.

Nor is it every day students get to listen to a respected, big-time basketball player giving them advice on how to navigate through what might arguably be the most difficult period in their lives.

Wednesday, a few hundred grade 7 and 8 students from Hawthorne Village Public School gathered at the Milton Sports Centre to attend a conference that included a keynote address by Will Njoku, a former member of the Canadian National Basketball program.

The conference focused on encouraging students to make wise decisions and helping them realize they're in control of their destinies.

It's a message Njoku drove home to students as only someone they admired could.

### Hopes to motivate youth

"I want you guys to know this presentation is for you. I want you to gain an advantage so you can achieve the vision you have for yourselves," said the basketball player, who proudly told his awe-struck audience he has a seven-and-a-half-foot wingspan and size 17 running shoes.

Njoku visits schools as a motivational speaker with the Esteem Team, a group of athletes committed to inspiring youth.

Students listened with awe as his accomplishments were listed. Njoku was a member of the Canadian National Basketball program as a player from 1989 to 1998, and competed in three World Championship tournaments during that time.

With humour and candor, the 34-year-old Njoku compared life to basketball and shared his philosophy for success, following the SAFE acronym: Set your feet, Aim high, Follow through, Every day.

In other words, get an education, set a goal, achieve that goal, and be consistent.

He used humorous stories students could relate to. Chances are a 13-year-

old boy doesn't know what it's like to be gawked at because of his gigantic frame, but he probably knows what it's like to not quite fit in.

"So much about growing up is about self esteem," Njoku said, adding, "I'm here to remind you how powerful you are."

He urged students to recognize that people are going to try to stand in the way of their dreams, and to simply push past them.

"It's so important to choose your friends and not let your friends choose you," he said.

And when tough times come, he told them to keep moving forward.

"You don't want to be a victim, you want to be a master of change. You want to be in the driver's seat," he said passionately.

For the conference, students used the book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* by Sean Covey as their primary resource.

### Could become annual event

Principal Grant Clatworthy told students he hopes the conference will become a yearly event, and said they can think of it as a legacy they're leaving to their younger peers.

"Long after you're gone, the conference continues," he said, following an inspiring clip from the Robin Williams flick *Dead Poets Society*. "We all live and we all die. The sense of today is to put something together that will continue on and on and on."

If there's one thing he said he hoped students would take away with them, it was that they're powerful.

"You have the power to be what you want to be in life," he told them.

Judging from students' comments at the end of the Njoku's talk, his words made an impact.

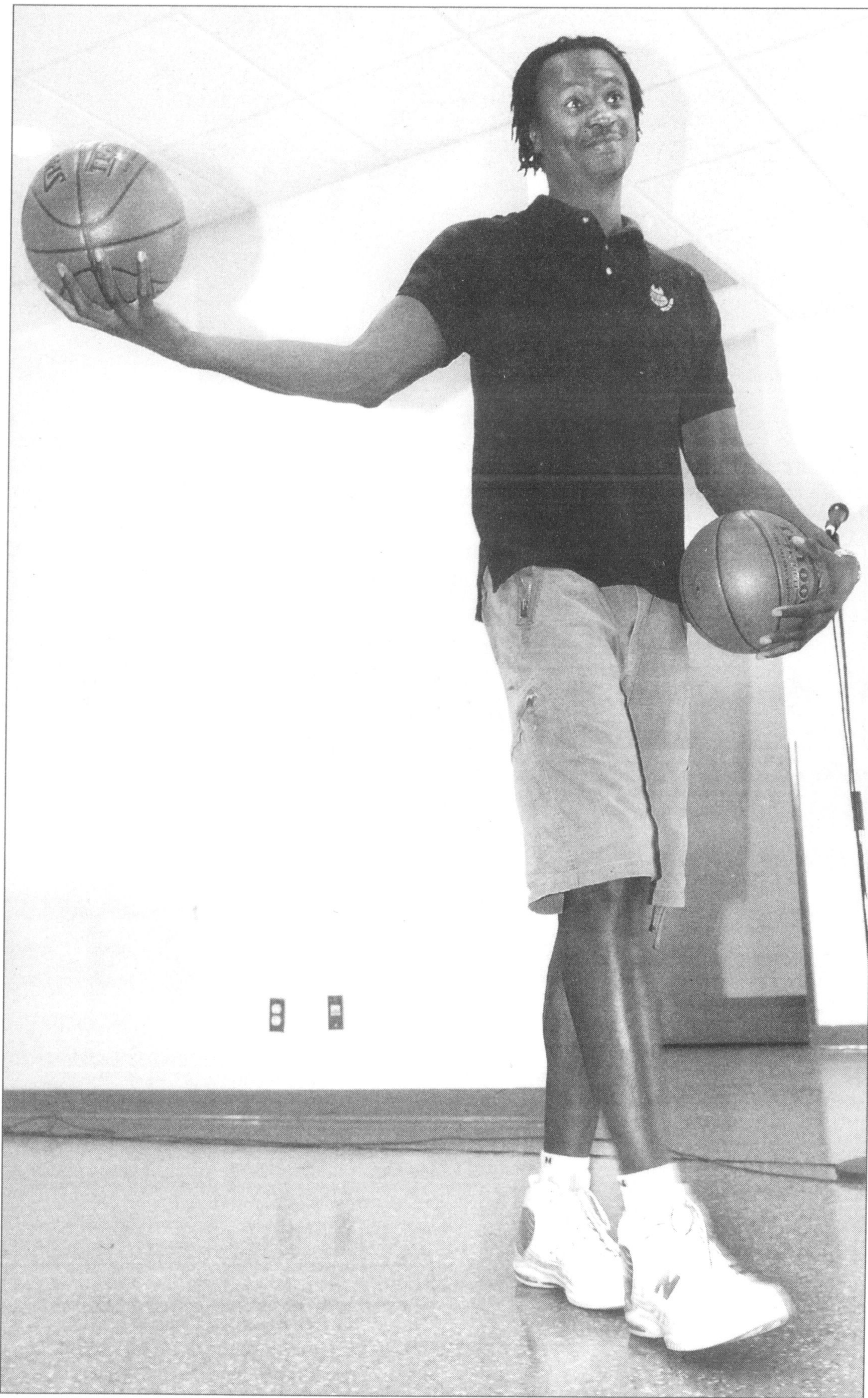
"I thought it was really good," said grade 7 student Susanna Mensah. "It was a strong message."

Grade 8 student Alexis Mlot said she took away one thought: "You make your own path."

And Courtney Dumouchel, who's in grade 7, said she realized how important it is to "stand up for what you believe in."

After the keynote address, students worked through various activities that focused on team building and problem solving.

Stephanie Thiessen can be reached at [sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com](mailto:sthiessen@miltoncanadianchampion.com).



**HEIGHTENED AWARENESS:** Six-foot-nine-inch former pro basketball player Will Njoku talks to students about the importance of self-esteem and making wise decisions at Milton Sports Centre Wednesday.

GRAHAM PAINE / CANADIAN CHAMPION

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**Programming Schedule – Tuesday, October 17 - Monday, October 23, 2006**

| Tuesday, October 24   | Wednesday, October 25   | Thursday, October 26   | Friday, October 27  | Saturday, October 28  | Sunday, October 29  | Monday, October 30  |
|---|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| 8:00am - Noon<br>Plugged In! EXTRA<br>Municipal Election 2006: Candidate Statements | 8:00am - Noon<br>Plugged In! EXTRA<br>Municipal Election 2006: Candidate Statements | 8:00am - Noon<br>Plugged In! EXTRA<br>Swap Talk (Replay)                             | 8:00am - Noon<br>Plugged In! EXTRA<br>Municipal Election 2006: Candidate Statements | 8:00am - noon<br>Plugged In! EXTRA<br>Municipal Election 2006: Candidate Statements | 8:00am - 10:30pm<br>Plugged In! EXTRA<br>TVC Sports: Halton High School Sr. Football: Barson vs Waterdown | 8:00-noon<br>Plugged In! EXTRA<br>Municipal Election 2006: Candidate Statements       |
| 1:00pm<br>SportsZONE Live   | 1:00pm<br>Halton Hills Awards & Council   | 1:00pm<br>Milton Council (cc)  | 1:00pm<br>Municipal Election 2006: Regional Chair Debate                            | 1:00pm<br>Municipal Election 2006: Guelph/Eramosa Debate                            | 1:00pm-5:00pm<br>Municipal Election 2006: Candidate Statements  | 1:00pm<br>Halton Hills Awards & Council (cc)  |
| 2:00pm<br>Municipal Election 2006: Candidate Statements                             | 4:00pm - 6:00pm<br>Plugged In! EXTRA  | 4:00pm-6:00pm<br>Plugged In! EXTRA<br>Municipal Election 2006: Regional Chair Debate | 4:00pm-6:00pm<br>Municipal Election 2006: Regional Chair Debate                     | 3:00pm<br>Municipal Election 2006: Regional Chair Debate                            | 5:00pm<br>Plugged In! EXTRA<br>Halton Hills Awards & Council (cc)   | 4:00pm - 6:00pm<br>Plugged In! EXTRA<br>Municipal Election 2006: Candidate Statements |
| 3:00pm - 6:30pm<br>Plugged In! EXTRA<br>Optimist TV Bingo (Live)                    | 6:00pm<br>Municipal Election 2006: Candidate Statements                             | 8:00pm<br>Municipal Election 2006: Guelph/Eramosa Debate                             | 3:00pm<br>Plugged In! EXTRA<br>Municipal Election 2006: Regional Chair Debate       | 5:00pm<br>TVC Sports: Halton HS Sr Football - Barton vs Waterdown                   | 6:00pm<br>Plugged In! EXTRA<br>Municipal Election 2006: Candidate Statements                              | 6:00pm-8:00pm<br>Municipal Election 2006: Candidate Statements                        |
| 7:30pm<br>Plugged In! EXTRA<br>Auto Experts (Live)                                  | 7:00pm<br>Simply Halton   | 10:00pm-Midnight<br>Plugged In! EXTRA  | 6:00pm-7:30pm<br>Municipal Election 2006: Regional Chair Debate                     | 7:00pm<br>2006 Smooth Jazz Awards   | 9:00pm-10:00pm<br>Plugged In! EXTRA   | 8:00pm<br>SportsZONE Live   |
| 8:00pm<br>Auto Experts (Live)   | 8:00pm<br>Swap Talk (Live)  |  | 6:00-10:00pm<br>Municipal Election 2006: Candidate Statements                       | 9:00pm<br>Municipal Election 2006: Candidate Statements                             |   | 9:00pm - Midnight<br>Plugged In! EXTRA  |
| 9:00pm<br>Halton Hills Awards & Council   | 9:00pm<br>Milton Council  |  | 10:00pm-Midnight<br>Plugged In! EXTRA   | 10:00pm-Midnight<br>Plugged In! EXTRA   |   |   |