

Austin Hatch tells his story of recovery



GRIT—Austin Hatch, a 22-year-old University of Michigan student, survived two plane crashes and emerged from a coma to recover his ability to walk. *BELLA HEILNER/Observer photos*

Student Claire Barron's efforts brought Austin Hatch to Morenci schools

How did Austin Hatch end up speaking in Morenci? It started with teacher Christina Grondin and ended with seventh grade student Claire Barron.

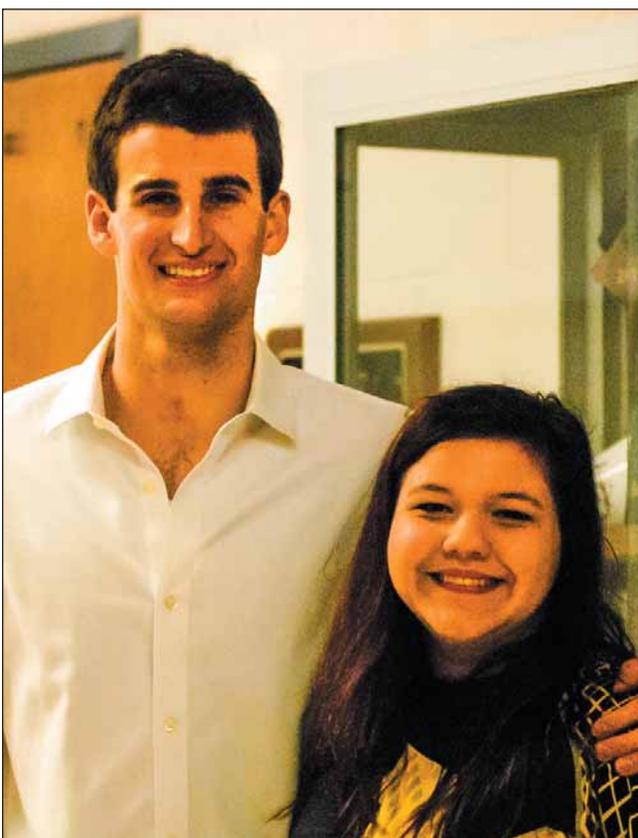
Ms. Grondin showed her students the ESPN 30-on-30 special about Hatch.

"I posed a challenge to my entire CORE 7 class," she said. "I challenged someone in that group to find a contact for Austin Hatch and find out whether he had time in his schedule to come speak at Morenci and how much it would cost for such an event to happen."

Within six hours, Claire Barron had already done all of the legwork—sent him

an e-mail, found out that he could come during his spring break and that his price range varied dependent on what a school could afford.

"From that point, I simply communicated with Austin about the specific date and time, along with his presentation resource needs," Ms. Grondin said. "Claire also went with me to Kiwanis to present the upcoming assembly and through her presentation Kiwanis generously donated \$500, a match if we raised at least \$500 ourselves. This young lady definitely has something to put on her first résumé."



SUCCESS—Morenci seventh grade student Claire Barron took the initiative to contact Austin Hatch after her teacher, Christina Grondin, showed an ESPN video about the former University of Michigan basketball player. Claire also attended a Morenci Kiwanis Club meeting to seek a donation to help pay for Hatch's visit.

UM student talks to Morenci students about overcoming adversity

By BELLA HEILNER

Grit, guts and heart.

What more could you expect from the survivor of two airplane crashes?

Austin Hatch, a 22-year-old University of Michigan student, came to Morenci last week to speak to middle and high school students about the adversity he's faced and the obstacles he's overcome.

Hatch feels driven to share his story to show others that it is possible to overcome impediments and reach goals. The former Wolverine basketball player gives inspirational speeches across the country while earning a business degree from the university.

"We are all inevitably going to face things," Hatch told students. "You can't always control what happens to you, but you can always control how you respond to it."

At the age of eight, he lost his mother and siblings in an airplane crash, which he survived. Then in high school, both his father and step-mother died in a second airplane crash that left him in a coma for two months. Doctors told his family there was a possibility he would never wake from the coma. If he did, he may never be able to walk or talk again.

Shortly before his second accident, the Ft. Wayne, Ind., native received an athletic scholarship to play for the University of Michigan. He was working to be the best basketball player he could be, but after waking from the coma, he had to relearn how to walk and talk.

"I had to work 10 times as hard to be 10 percent of the athlete that I once was," he said.

The fact that he made such progress after such dire circumstances, is, in itself, a miracle.

Hatch told students that "our purpose drives grit, and grit starts with our pur-

pose."

"Sports and my parents instilled in me a certain kind of mindset. When we're down at halftime, we can either fold and give in and say that the game is over, or we can come back in the second half and win the game. This is how I saw my road to recovery."

To Hatch, grit means growth, resilience, integrity and team.

Hatch stated that his inspiration has always come from his father.

"Every place he went, and every person he talked to, he left better than he found them."

It was just one of the memorable things for which Hatch commended his father. His father's life continues to inspire him today.

After his talk Friday, Hatch answered questions from students. They asked about his hopes for the future, if he can still dunk the ball, and if he would fly in a plane again. Hatch responded that he hopes to earn a degree, marry and become a father. Yes, he can dunk. Yes, he does still fly often.

Many students and a few teachers waited after the program for a chance to speak with the guest, to get a photo with him and to get an autograph. He signed everything from school papers to the shirts on their backs and the shoes off their feet.

Morenci students walked away with a new meaning to the word "grit" which is part of one of the school's slogans.

Teacher Christina Grondin told Hatch, "As an educator and a human being, standing here today, you have left me better by just watching and listening to you."

• Hatch's visit was made possible in part by a donation from the Morenci Kiwanis Club, which voted to donate \$500 and match what students collected up to \$500.

You can control your response to adversity

— Austin Hatch



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