

# Dream Big



February 10, 2021

By Alice Roche Cody

The list of Max Siegel's achievements is long and impressive: the first African American to graduate Notre Dame Law School with honors, a nationally renowned sports and entertainment executive, and owner of Revolution Racing, a NASCAR race team. During his diverse career, Mr. Siegel managed musical artists such as Usher, Justin Timberlake, and Britney Spears, and sports legends including Hall of Famers Reggie White and Tony Gwynn.

And don't forget, dear friend of Candace Pryor Brown, assistant director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, who invited Mr. Siegel to speak with our Middle and Upper School students as part of Black History Month. During his two Zoom talks, the CEO of USA Track & Field shared inspirational thoughts on leadership and answered questions about everything from transgender athletes to the culture of NASCAR to the prospects of the summer Olympics.

For his [Upper School virtual visit](#), Mr. Siegel stressed the importance of building relationships, the building blocks for his career that propelled him from a broken home to become a top executive in multiple high-profile arenas. It all started with his high school mentor.

"My high school wrestling coach helped me believe in myself and taught me the importance of academics," he said. "He helped me get into Notre Dame, where I was recruited to play baseball. My professors there invested in me." Then, after working for three years after graduation, he returned to his alma mater to attend law school. Here, the dean told him that he had a unique opportunity to contribute to society. Mr. Siegel has heeded that call ever since, starting with his work in the sports and music industries, perfect platforms to unify and connect with broad audiences.

Relationships also gave Mr. Siegel entrée into realms traditionally not reserved for minorities, such as NASCAR racing. He explained that NASCAR has a long generational lineage that he was not a part of, but his friendship with Dale Earnhardt, Jr., led him to become president of Global Operations at Dale Earnhardt, Inc. "I became involved as an outsider; I don't come from a racing family and had to build my cred," he said. "Dale Earnhardt, Jr., and I developed a great relationship, and he became my ambassador. He gave me the opportunity for people to know me." This inspired Mr. Siegel and his wife, Jennifer Satterfield-Siegel, to become owners of Revolution Racing and work to increase representation of women and minorities in NASCAR, notably, Darrell "Bubba" Wallace.

During the Q&A, a student asked Mr. Siegel about the organization's plan for transgender athletes. He serves as CEO of USA Track & Field, the sport's governing body on local, national, and international levels, including the Olympics. "There are rules that govern the qualifications of athletes to compete; it's not just social or political, it's science as well," he said. "We're faced with a challenge for competitions across the country because each state has its own rules. We seek to honor athletes' wishes and follow the rules of specific states. While an agreement can be reached philosophically, the situation is highly complicated by the laws of each state."

And as for the summer Olympics, he predicts the games will be held this summer, as planned, in Tokyo. "The Olympics will look different behind-the-scenes, as far as crowds and audiences, but it won't be noticeable for people watching on TV," he said, adding that numerous protocols and procedures are being added to ensure the health and safety of athletes.

Mr. Siegel left our high schoolers with advice about how to follow their passion and succeed. "Have the courage to take some risks," he said. "No matter how hard you work, you'll have setbacks, but that's where the growth happens." Above all, he told students to let compassion be their guiding force. He looks forward to mentoring emerging leaders like themselves and his three children. "My goal is to create and help train and

develop future leaders for tomorrow," he said. "I'm devoted to paving the way for you guys to lead us to a better place."

During the Middle School presentation, Mr. Siegel related how seventh grade was when he first dreamed about being the best he could be to make the world a better place. It proved a pivotal time, as he had just lost his dad to cancer, and he stressed the importance of forming strong and sustaining relationships with friends and mentors.

"Surround yourselves with people you respect," he said. "Look to your teachers and administrators and what they do on daily basis. They could be anywhere in world, but they choose to be here to give you the resources to be successful."

This talk also focused on leadership, and he bestowed his inspirational advice. "Dream big and go for it; don't pay attention to anyone who tells you you can't," he said. "Don't be afraid to make decisions you know are right, even if they're not popular. You don't have to be perfect. We all make mistakes. Be grateful, be humble, and try to do what's right."

At the end of both discussions, Mr. Siegel talked about the need for unity in our country and touched on today's relevancy of the podium protest at the 1968 Olympics. During the medal ceremony, as the National Anthem played, two African American athletes, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, raised their fists. Athlete Peter Norman stood with his fellow medal winners. "People often overlook that Peter Norman, who was a white person on the podium, stood in support of the protest and paid a tremendous personal price for affecting change," he said. "It takes all of us. Yes, we're black 365 days a year, but we belong to a global community. It takes all of us to come together to address issues and improve relationships."