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August 29, 2012

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Gardner-Webb University welcomed professional Nike athlete and 2012 Olympic Silver Medalist Manteo Mitchell to Spangler Stadium on Saturday during the football game against Wofford College at 6 p.m. He spoke to student groups, spent time with select donors and signed autographs for fans.

Mitchell earned international praise for his heroic efforts in the 4X400 meter relay preliminaries during the 2012 Olympics, finishing his run despite suffering a broken bone in his leg at the 200-meter mark. He still managed to clock a time of 46.1 seconds, which landed Team USA in the finals where they finished second behind the Bahamas. He said most people wonder how he was able to finish that lap on a broken leg. “I put aside all the fears, all the pain, and just made it through,” he shared. “When you show fear, that’s when you show weakness. I just happened to make it through and I know God had a lot to do with that. I give him all the credit.”

A native of Cleveland County, this Crest High graduate played football until an injury during his senior year kept him off the field. He said he hadn’t really thought about running until it was suggested to him by one of his high school coaches. “Football was my first love,” Mitchell said. “After my injury, my receiver’s coach invited me to run track with the team my senior year. I’m the type of person that once I commit to something, I want to take it to the highest degree possible. In track, that’s the Olympics.”

After high school, Mitchell went to Western Carolina University where he collected 32 All-Southern Conference titles and advanced to the NCAA championships three times in four years. Earlier this year, during the 2012 Olympic Trials, he qualified for Team USA by finishing fifth in the 400 meters with a time of 44.96, which qualified him to run in the 4X400 meter relay as a member of the U.S. relay team. “I think it set in, that I was an Olympian and my dream had come true, the night of the opening ceremonies,” Mitchell recalled. “When you walk out and the crowd is cheering for you, and they announce ‘the United States of America’—I think that was my Olympic moment.”

Most people would disagree, stating that he showed the heart of a true Olympian when he persevered in spite of a dream-shattering injury. But Mitchell is quick to offer thanks to the community support he felt then and continues to feel now. “I just want to thank everyone for the love and support over the years,” he said. “I know a lot of people back home are supporting me and care a lot about me and I hope I made them proud. I appreciate everything they’ve done for me.”

Gardner-Webb may have unknowingly played a role in his journey to the Olympics. “One reason I’m doing this [Saturday], a lot of people don’t know, but when I was at home during breaks from school, I would train at Gardner-Webb,” Mitchell said. “I would go by myself or with my high school coach. So I definitely give credit to Gardner-Webb for allowing me to use their athletic facilities for training when I was away from my normal routine.”

Mitchell believes there are a few things that have contributed to his success both personally and professionally. His words of wisdom carry special meaning in light of his recent experiences. “Integrity, honesty, faith, focus, finish,” he shared. “That’ll get you through.”

Listen to an audio file interview with Manteo Mitchell