

Students learn about overcoming disabilities

By Kathryn Reed

Nationally ranked wrestler in high school. Green belt in martial arts. World traveler. Accomplished artist. Motivational speaker.

This is a great resume – and one that is similar to many people's. What makes Brett Eastburn different, a word he probably would not use, is that he has no arms or legs. The 41-year-old was born with a congenital birth defect known as Quad-membral Limbs Deficiency.

When he played high school basketball the other team just stared as he scooted down the court dribbling the ball. They didn't bother to cover the guy under the basket because they never thought Eastburn could throw the ball. He could. And he soon became his coach's secret weapon.

"Handicaps are not always where they appear to be," Eastburn said, pointing out that the other team's preconceived thoughts about his ability became a disability for them.



Brett Eastburn signs autographs Sept. 26 for South Tahoe Middle School

students. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The message Eastburn brought to the entire South Tahoe Middle School student body on Sept. 26 was about what people *can* do.

“When you say you can’t you are right because you aren’t even going to try,” Eastburn told the nearly 800 students as well as the adults in the room.

He started to draw to prove his point. To do so Eastburn put a marker next to his cheek that he held there with what he has of a left arm. (He is quick to point out that his nickname on his high school basketball team was stub.)

When he’s done with drawing Garfield he asks the audience if they could do the same thing. Most said no. To which Eastburn said, “You have missed the point of the presentation.”

And then Eastburn explained how by breaking the process into pieces it is easier to accomplish the goal. It’s starting with a circle, making some squiggles and other shapes to have the finished piece of artwork.

He said people tend to fail when they try to do everything at once.

Sitting on a table Eastburn was able to show the students how he can throw a football without fully developed limbs. He has no hands or elbows. He put a spiral on a football that might have Jim Harbaugh wondering if Colin Kaepernick should be replaced.

Eastburn readily admits these skills didn’t come easily. It took multiple times at failure to be able to be accomplished at what he desired to do.

“No” does not appear to be in his vocabulary.

He knows people can be uncomfortable when they see him. But if the number of students who sought his autograph after the

assembly is any indication, STMS kids thought he was someone special.

Principal Beth Delacour told *Lake Tahoe News* it is good for students to realize "we are more alike than different."

(Soroptimist International Tahoe Sierra paid for the presentation.)

Students were able to ask him any question. He said he uses a toothbrush for his teeth, a razor to shave, has no problems going to the bathroom by himself, and wiggles into his clothes. He has different ways to handle silverware for eating.

Eastburn sprinkles humor into much of what he has to say. After all, he is also a standup comedian. He'll be at the Pioneer Underground in Reno at 8 tonight. (It's for adults.)

Last year Eastburn published a book about his life called "I'm Not Missing Anything". He and his wife, who is able bodied, travel the world spreading the message that people can do what they want if they put their minds to it.