



NEWS	BLOGS	RESTAURANTS	CALENDAR	MUSIC	MOVIE
------	-------	-------------	----------	-------	-------

[write to the editor](#) | [email a friend](#) | [print article](#) | [show comments \(6\)](#)

Off the Short Bus

Steve Fleming fought to make his Special Olympians equal, and that got him torched

By **Jesse Hyde**

Published: September 13, 2007

Mark Graham



Mark Graham



"It was amazing seeing how those kids felt in those uniforms and shoes versus what they had," Fleming says. "And I realized something, these kids can do more if you push them."

Courtesy Flower Mound Mustangs

On this much, everyone agrees: Steve Fleming was unlike anything the Special Olympics had ever seen.

At 6 foot 3 and 240 pounds, the former Marine had an imposing presence. He was also black, and in the 23-year history of the Lewisville Special Olympics delegation, there had been few, if any, blacks.

What made him unusual, however, was his philosophy. He didn't believe that his kids were special. Sure they were special, as any kid is, and yes, they had special needs, but he wasn't going to treat them differently than he would any other athlete. Instead, he would treat them like they were "normal."

And so he recruited, he drew up plays, he yelled—he even encouraged his players to talk trash. It wasn't rare to see him playing right alongside his players—swatting shots, hitting fadeaways, talking smack the whole way. In his words, he brought the "black funk" to the Special Olympics.

He also brought a new attitude. He taught the players to have



Steve Fleming turned the Flower Mound Mustangs into a golf powerhouse. At one tournament, they took gold, silver and bronze.

Courtesy Flower Mound Mustangs



Fleming made sure his teams looked good for competitions. "Don't tell me they don't know the difference," he would say.

Courtesy Flower Mound Mustangs



Courtesy Flower Mound Mustangs



Subject(s): [Lewisville](#), [Flower Mound](#), [basketball](#), [Special Olympics](#)

pride in themselves. "They're athletes, all right?" he would say. "They may not be able to perform at the level of the varsity basketball player, but they're still athletes, and I want to treat them like they're athletes."

For Fleming it was simple: Give a kid a gray T-shirt and a bologna sandwich, and he'll play like a Special Olympian. Hook him up with new gear, make sure he has Gatorade to drink, and you'll be amazed at his capabilities.

One day in practice, for example, he noticed a player laboring to get up the court. Fleming called her over and asked her what was wrong. "My feet hurt, coach," the girl said. Fleming took a look at the girl's shoes, and there he found the problem. The girl was wearing one shoe from K-Mart and another from Wal-Mart.

So Fleming called up Nike and said, "I'm sure you get people all the time asking for donations. I don't want that. Just give me a deal on some discontinued items." The Nike rep was stunned. Never before, in 20-odd years, had he heard a request like that. So he agreed to give Fleming some shoes. Not just for the girl with the mismatched sneakers, but for the entire team.

Suddenly, the girl who couldn't run was flying up and down the court. The same thing happened when Fleming convinced Nike to outfit his team with silky new uniforms and warm-up suits. A boy who could never hit a shot, now decked out in his new gear, went to the top of the key and drained five jumpers in a row. Fleming couldn't help but smile.

It was hard to argue with his results. In his first year as basketball coach, his team won the state championship. And they didn't just win. At times, Fleming had to play three-on-five to keep it competitive.

Be Social



Angela Hunt Barry Bonds
Carter Albrecht cheap lunch
City Hall Contemporary Theatre...
Dallas Cowboys Dallas Morning News David Lynch
DNA exonerees DOMA **DVD releases** immigration
Judd Apatow levees M.I.A. Meryl Streep music awards
music scene infighting Oak Cliff Ole Anthony referendum
seafood Seth Rogen SMU Steve Carell **toll road**
Tony Romo Toronto Film Festival
Trinity River project



What we are writing abc

Recent Articles

Related Articles

Recent Articles By Jesse Hyde

- ❖ **[Family Shattered After Oscar Sanchez's Murder](#)**
Sanchez's family thought they'd left the lawlessness of Mexico behind. But somehow it caught up with them.
- ❖ **[Big Build-Up](#)**
One of the city's worst neighborhoods gets better, for a profit
- ❖ **[Rolling Canvas](#)**
- ❖ **[Weed Killers](#)**
DEA agents see Mexican cartels behind huge pot farms here
- ❖ **[Toddlerpalooza](#)**
The Wiggles play for screaming babes

National Features

Miami New Times

[The Grow Me State](#)
Oranges aren't the only cash crop they're raising in Florida.

By Francisco Alvarado

Westword

[Detectives Gone Wild](#)
What was blown besides this cop's cover?

By Luke Turf

City Pages

[Crossing Borders](#)
The agent who busted "20th Hijacker" Zacarias Moussaoui joins a law firm known for its aggressive defense of immigrant rights
By Jeff Severns Guntzel

Despite his success, not everyone was pleased. To some parents, Fleming's emphasis on winning seemed to fly the face of everything the Special Olympics stood for. For many kids, the Special Olympics was their only social outlet. If Fleming made it too competitive, they would have nowhere else to go.

Plus, some of the kids on his team, well, they hardly seemed "special." The trash-talking, the swagger—the worldliness, as one parent put it—it all seemed so out of place in the Special Olympics. It was like he had brought the cutthroat world of Texas youth sports into the last arena where kids could still play just for fun.

The Lewisville delegation was divided. Half the parents believed in what Fleming was doing. Thanks to him, their children were performing at levels they never thought possible. The rest wanted him gone. Eventually, the delegation, 120 families strong, would split in two: Half the parents would follow Fleming to form a new group called the Flower Mound Mustangs, and the other half would stay behind to pick up the pieces.

Today, Fleming is out of Special Olympics altogether. In July the Special Olympics banned him for a year and disbanded his start-up delegation, the first time in recent memory either has happened in Texas.

As a result, some of the athletes that followed Fleming are now in limbo. Their parents say the old delegation won't welcome them back, and without another place to play, they aren't sure where they will go.

But Steve Fleming remains unapologetic. His methods, he is convinced, while controversial and unorthodox, are the most effective way to help kids with mental disabilities. "You aren't doing your kids any favors if you treat them with kid gloves," he says. "At some point, they're going to have to go out in the world, and if they're not ready, they'll get their teeth kicked in. So I try to treat them as much as possible like regular kids."

As strange as it sounds, he may be right. _____

To understand how Steve Fleming got in this mess in the first place, you have to meet his son, Steven Fleming. On weekdays after school you will find him on the football field with the Hebron Hawks. If he works hard enough, he might play varsity next year.

That is something of a miracle. The boy has the size. At 6 foot 4 and 240 pounds, he is now taller than his father. He can anchor a defensive line, like he did last year. But playing tight end, like the 16-year-old is this year, requires smarts. The boy may be many things, but smart is not one of them. He has an IQ of less than 70.

That he is playing high school football is a tribute to his parents, and especially his father, who has made it a point to pass on every bit of his athletic knowledge to his son.

It's been that way since the boy was in the first grade. At the time, the Flemings were living in Cleveland. One spring afternoon, while most kids were outside playing, Fleming came home to find his son sitting on the couch. Fleming asked his son why he wasn't outside playing. "No other kids will play with me," the boy said. They said he was too dumb.

"Man, that cut me like a knife," Fleming says. "So I made a decision right then and there that from then on, he would have someone to play with, no matter how tired I was."

Fleming had known his son was slow since the boy was 2, but he had been in denial. Part of it, Fleming says, was

fear. He had been shot at, been in fights, been unable to pay his bills, but he had never faced a challenge like this one. "What did I know about raising a special needs child?" he asks. "I was terrified."

Once Fleming realized how far behind his son was in school, he and his wife did everything they could to help him, even investing thousands of dollars on teaching aides and tutors.

Fleming also believed in the power of sports to build self-esteem—he had played football in college and came from a family where much of life revolved around sports—and so he began teaching his son how to dribble a basketball, catch a football and swing a golf club.

In Cleveland, the Special Olympics program was small and disorganized. It wasn't until the family moved to Lewisville seven years ago that Fleming and his son became heavily involved in the Special Olympics.

At first, he wasn't impressed with what he saw. It looked like play time. No structure, no guidance; in his words "just a bunch of kids running up and down the court."

To Fleming, sports were fun, but they were also about discipline. He had spent five years in the Marines, and in that experience had taught him anything, it was that success came only after hard work.

He volunteered to coach the Special Olympics basketball team his son was on, which happened to be one of the lowest-level teams. Immediately, things changed. He ran drills. He made the kids run "suicide" wind sprints. If someone made a mistake in practice, he stopped play to explain what they had done wrong. He also taught discipline and respect for the game. Talking trash was fine in practice but never in a game or to an opposing player. Talking back to refs would not be tolerated.

Despite his athletic background, he found it difficult to get through to the kids. Simple concepts like switching from one diagrammed play to another were hard for them to grasp. His point guard, for example, couldn't figure out what to do when the defense adjusted to a certain play.

One day, while running practice, he had an idea. So he called his point guard over. "David," he said. "Do you watch TV?" The boy nodded. "When you watch something you don't like, what do you do?"

"I change the channel, coach."

"That's right, you change the channel. Here's what I want you to do. When you're out there and you see something you don't like, you change the channel, OK? You've got two channels: play one and play two. When you see that one don't work, just change the channel."

And like that, it clicked. Finally getting through to his players, Fleming felt a joy he had never experienced in coaching.

At the time, Fleming was traveling a lot for work and periodically had to leave his team in another coach's hands. One day after practice, a parent approached him. "Steve," the parent said, "I don't think you realize when you're gone how big a difference it makes to these kids. It's totally different when you're here."

That was the first time Fleming had any indication that what he was doing was working. Complete validation

would come that year at the state games in Waco. By this time, Fleming had secured the new uniforms and shoes from Nike.

"We go down there, and we hadn't won a game," Fleming recalls. "It was like watching a third-rate racehorse finally turned loose—we couldn't hold them back. We won every game.

"It was amazing seeing how those kids felt in those uniforms and shoes versus what they had. It was unbelievable how they responded. And I realized something, these kids can do more if you push them."

Not everyone was happy. One day in practice Fleming looked up to see a group of parents in the stands talking to each other. "What's going on?" he asked another coach. "They're trying to start trouble with you," a parent said. "They think you're pushing the kids too hard."

But Fleming wasn't going to stop. His kids were more than catching on; they were really beginning to believe in themselves. After they won the state championship the next year they told Fleming they were ready to take on a team full of "normal kids."

So Fleming called up SMU and asked if he could bring a team to the summer basketball camp. If he slowed the camp down in any way, he would take his team home, he promised.

The opposite happened. His kids were embraced. And when it came time for the tournament that would end the camp, two of Fleming's top players were drafted to the championship team. Fleming himself was coaching one of the teams, matching wits with a Division I college coach on the opposite sideline. As he puts it, he was in "hog heaven." It only got better when one of his players hit the game-winning shot.

When Fleming returned from the camp, there was trouble waiting for him. The board, a group of volunteer parents who oversaw the delegation, wanted to know why he had only taken his team to the camp. Why hadn't he invited the delegation as a whole?

And there were other complaints. One parent said he was bumping white players from his team in favor of black ones. Those who played on his team also got special treatment. On tournaments where traveling was required, for example, he often bought them dessert while other kids in the delegation had none. To Fleming, this was his way of rewarding his players for their hard work. But other parents didn't see it that way. In their minds, he was only interested in helping the most capable of athletes. In the "lower-functioning" kids, he had no interest.

Fleming couldn't believe it. He had raised money for the organization, he had volunteered countless hours, he had even spent money out of his own pocket to take care of his team. And for what? A bunch of ungrateful parents.

If they wanted him out of the organization, he would go. _____

There is another side to this story. That Fleming was an egomaniac, a man obsessed with winning at all costs, who would push aside anyone who didn't agree with him, whether they were parents who had been coaching for years or players who weren't good enough to make his team. He not only split the delegation in two, a delegation that had existed peacefully for more than 20 years, they say, he drove parents and their children away with his abrasive, and at times abusive, personality. According to several parents, he made physical threats, warning or

school administrator that he would "kick his ass" if he ever messed with his son. There are some members of the delegation who say they fear him and will not be a part of Special Olympics if he is involved.

Because Steve Fleming isn't the only person in trouble with the Special Olympics, because the entire Lewisville delegation is on probation, none of the parents involved with the delegation, be they supporters of Fleming's or detractors, would speak on the record for this story for fear that they would be blacklisted by Special Olympics Texas.

"You've got to understand," one parent says. "If we get kicked out, our kids have nowhere else to go. This is the only game in town."

Parents on both sides will agree that the problems started long before Fleming came into the picture. For at least eight years, there were complaints about the delegation's head, an adaptive physical education teacher with the Lewisville Independent School District named Jim Domer.

Domer had helped start the delegation, but, according to several parents, he did little if anything as head of the delegation, even though the Lewisville school district was paying him a stipend on top of his regular salary for work with Special Olympics. According to these parents, he often forgot to schedule buses to take kids to tournaments, he failed to have gyms open for practices and he sometimes showed up late for events. "I wasn't really sure what he did," says the mother of an autistic child who was part of the delegation for nearly 10 years. "All I knew was he was this guy who was always standing around talking to people, but as far as what his job was I had no idea."

"Everyone did his job for him," says another mother who had been in the delegation for nearly 15 years. "There was no real responsibility there, even though the school district was paying him."

In the late '90s, a group of parents organized what one would describe as a "coup attempt" to have Domer removed. When that failed, the parents decided that they would have to make the best of a bad situation.

Other parents saw things differently. They saw Domer as a caring man who knew each of their children well. Sure, he made mistakes here and there, but they were minor. For the time he put in, they felt like he went above and beyond the requirements. (Domer would only reply to questions via e-mail and didn't respond to more than half, because, in his words, he saw no point in responding to negative personal attacks.)

When Fleming came along, things began to change. "He brought a fresh attitude. He started to question things. He wondered why our kids weren't treated the same by the school as regular athletes were," says one mother. "It sort of opened our eyes."

As a coach, and later, as an elected member of the board that oversaw the delegation, he recruited new kids into the program, focusing especially on minorities, which, according to Fleming, had been ignored under Domer. He put on the delegation's first ever basketball clinic, scoring sponsors to supply the water and cater lunch as well as a coach from SMU to run the clinics.

Over time, he built a relationship with SMU. Members of his delegation were ball boys at SMU basketball games and during football season they had tailgating events with SMU athletes and cheerleaders.

"He brought in corporate people, landed sponsorships we didn't have before," says another mother. "He was exposing our kids to more than just the occasional competition and getting a medal. There was much more social interaction, and the kids loved it."

As the program grew in ambition, Domer's responsibilities became more important. On a number of occasions say Fleming and his supporters, the Lewisville coach dropped the ball. One of the most egregious examples, at least in Fleming's mind, was the basketball camp held in 2005. For weeks, Fleming had worked to set up the clinic.

According to Fleming, he had told Domer well in advance about the camp. As head of the delegation, it was Domer's job to schedule the gym. A few days before the camp, Fleming stopped by the gym to make sure everything was set up. To his shock, the gym hadn't even been scheduled. What was worse, a remodeling project was set to commence that week.

Fleming says he got on the phone, and after a conversation with the school's principal, averted disaster. The camp went off without a hitch. He was furious, but he says when he complained to Domer, he was met with indifference. "What's the big deal?" he says Domer told him. "It all worked out."

Fleming and his supporters had had enough. In November 2005, the president of the volunteer board that oversaw the delegation wrote a letter to the head of the school district's special education department complaining about Domer.

While Domer's supporters would see the letter as an attempt to get him fired, those who wrote it say this was not their intention. Instead, they say they were hoping that the district could help him perform his job better.

When word of the letter spread, parents who had not been consulted about it, and who had been in the delegation for years, were furious. "They didn't speak for me," says one mother. "Could Jim Domer have done things a little better? Absolutely. But you have to remember that he had a full-time job and that's teaching special needs kids every day. He cared about those kids, and his heart was in the right place."

"We're all volunteers, everyone's doing the best they can, and all of a sudden they're treating this thing like it's Fortune 500 company and Jim's the CEO," says another father. "His job was sort of like being the Scoutmaster for five troops. He was responsible for 100 to 120 people in 10 sports. He needed some help, not people trying to tear him down."

At a meeting several weeks later, tensions that had been bubbling for years between the two groups finally erupted.

"It was like a bad wedding," says one parent who was there. "You had one group sitting on one side and another group on the other."

At one point, according to several parents, Steve Fleming and a female supporter of Domer's got into a shouting match just inches from each other's faces. Others said the yelling between parents spilled into the parking lot after the meeting.

The bickering would continue for months, until finally, Special Olympics Texas and the Lewisville school district

decided that the only way to resolve the matter was to split the delegation in two. Domer's supporters would remain in the original Lewisville delegation. Fleming's would become the Flower Mound Mustangs.

For a few months, this arrangement worked, but before long, the two groups were back at it. The Lewisville delegation accused Fleming's new group of recruiting athletes from their delegation. Then they accused them of stealing uniforms and gear. What was worse, Fleming was refusing to share uniforms Nike had given him. The equipment was donated to him, he insisted, not the delegation. Special Olympics Texas put both delegations on probation, meaning their athletes could continue participating in Special Olympics events but that if things didn't change, the delegations would be suspended.

But the problems didn't stop. First, three of the five starters on Fleming's state championship team were arrested on charges of auto theft. The whispers began. If these kids were smart enough to steal cars and take them to a chop shop, should they even be in the Special Olympics? (Fleming says only one of the boys was actually charged and that the boy stole a car so he could buy oxygen for his ailing grandmother. Fleming kicked all three boys off the team.) Then Fleming blew up at the State Games, causing something of a scene when his depleted team was seeded higher than he thought fair. The Special Olympics had seen enough. In May, on what seemed like a trumped-up technicality (inability to fill out paperwork and the creation of an unapproved Web site), they banned him from the organization for a year and suspended his delegation.

The dispute would make the front page of *The Dallas Morning News* in August. The article, which appeared under the headline, "Parents Fighting Leaves Special Olympics in Limbo," drew several letters to the editor. "I am appalled at these overly competitive parents," one reader wrote. "It seems to me that it is the parents, not the children, who lack sufficient brainpower. Get a grip!"

From the outside looking in, the ugly affair—which climaxed in threats of lawsuits and allegations of racism and theft—does seem one more example of parents pushing their children too far. But local special education experts say it actually represents something else—progress.

"If there's a silver lining in this whole thing, it's that parents are having this argument about kids with disabilities. Going back 20 years ago people really perceived students with disabilities as being largely incapable of athletic activity, among other things," says David Chard, the dean of the education program at Southern Methodist University.

For much of the last century, children with mental disabilities were viewed as a lost cause when it came to education. It wasn't until 1975 that the federal government, under a law called the Intellectual Disabilities Education Act, required states to educate the mentally retarded. Up until that point, some states refused to let special needs children through the school doors.

"Special education really rode the coattails of the Civil Rights Movement," says Tandra Tyler-Wood, an educational psychology professor at the University of North Texas. "In fact, a lot of the language they used came directly from civil rights leaders like Dr. King. When you look at some of the things he wrote, you'll see that he wasn't just talking about black children, he was talking about all children."

The Special Olympics, which was founded in 1962 by Eunice Kennedy Shriver, represented a watershed moment for the movement. "With the Kennedys, I think because they were Camelot, they gave us the idea that it's OK to have a child who is mentally handicapped. Because until that point, if you had a child that was mentally retarded

it was sort of your fault and you just kept that kid in the back closet."

Since the mid-1990s, the movement has been toward inclusion, or mainstreaming, which means placing children with mental disabilities in regular education classrooms. This can mean rearranging the curriculum or having special aides in the class to accommodate students with learning disabilities or more difficult mental challenges. Several states—and local districts, including Irving and Dallas—have experimented with this idea, to mixed results. Some say inclusion is the best way to prepare for the real world, but skeptics say it doesn't work, that regular-ed teachers aren't equipped to deal with a child who is mentally handicapped. As a result, special need children in standard classrooms often don't get enough attention, or they get too much, impairing the education of everyone else in the class.

Tyler-Wood says Fleming's philosophy of treating special ed kids as normally as possible would be applauded by proponents of the inclusion movement. His contention that winning and "looking sharp" often matters as much to the mentally retarded as it does to "regular" kids is an opinion Tyler-Wood shares, and one that is backed up by research.

"Years ago I coached a Special Olympics basketball team that won the district tournament, and that meant so much to the kids," she said. "They had their names announced on the intercom, and they were heroes in the school for once in their lives. People were going around slapping their hands and saying, 'Way to go, you actually put our school on the map.'

"They had a school dance—none of them had ever gone to the school dance—and all of a sudden, people were asking them to dance. It was a miraculous breakthrough.

"How do you measure something like that? What makes a person successful in life? Quite honestly the reason people who are mentally retarded don't keep jobs is not because they can't read well or because they can't write well, it's because of their social skills. And really, that's what special education is about. It's about maximum integration into the greater society."

Nancy Meadows, director of the Alice Neeley Special Education Institute at Texas Christian University, has also seen the benefits of expecting more out of children with developmental disabilities. At TCU she helps run an early intervention program called KinderFrog for children with Down syndrome or other developmental disabilities. By the time children leave the program, at the age of 6, they are ready to enter an inclusive setting with typically developing children.

"We fully recognize that they have disabilities, but we have high expectations, the parents have high expectations, and if we didn't, they wouldn't achieve as much," Meadows says.

Meadows can empathize with Fleming and his supporters—parents who choose to enter her program are often second-guessed by other parents with special needs children. "It's the same argument among parents who choose to have their children included with regular education kids and parents who choose to have their kids in a more private, more self-contained setting, in a more protective environment. It's a very personal decision."

The most important thing, Meadows says, is to find an educational environment that works for the child.

But Meadows also stresses that the spirit of Special Olympics is one of participation. If that is lost, and kids

aren't having fun, it loses its value. The same could be said of all youth sports, Chard says, whether the participants are disabled or not.

"I think the really exciting aspect of this, again, is that parents are having this argument in the first place," Cha says. "It sounds like an argument any group of parents about any group of children could be having. How much do you want your child to be in a competitive sport and at what age? And it's exciting that today parents with children who have disabilities are asking themselves these questions, because even 20 years ago, that wouldn't have happened."

A month has passed since Steve Fleming was kicked out of the Special Olympics and his Flower Mound delegation was disbanded. Some parents who followed him still don't know what the future holds. They say the original delegation, which is also on probation, has been less than welcoming. In one case in particular, they denied a boy's bid to rejoin the delegation after he'd left for Flower Mound. The reason? His father is a troublemaker.

Members of the Lewisville delegation say they are trying to put the past behind them. They say that things are better now that Fleming and his supporters are gone. The group made mountains out of molehills, they say, specifically when it came to Domer. The last few months, parents say, have been especially hard on Domer, who was one of the delegation's founding members 25 years ago.

If there are any questions about his dedication, they point to the fact that he has given up his district-paid stipend to continue running the delegation.

"Our delegation chooses to focus on continuing to provide sport activities and opportunities for the Special Olympics athletes, which is why we are here. There are a tremendous number of families who devote countless hours to this organization and who also want to move forward and focus on the athletes, consistent with the Special Olympics mission," Domer wrote in an e-mail.

The most important thing, Domer's supporters say, is that their children are having fun again. That, they say, is the true spirit of the Special Olympics.

"We just want our kids to go out there and do their best and have fun and feel good about themselves. You have to remember that for most of these kids, this is the only place where they can go and feel good about themselves. And it's the only outlet for their parents to be around people who understand what it's like to raise a special needs child," says one mother. "We don't care if the kids win or they have the most expensive uniforms on the planet, and honestly, neither do the kids."

But other parents wonder. They say Fleming opened their eyes to new possibilities. One mother says she never believed her son could grasp golf. Fleming convinced her otherwise, and now her son loves the sport.

"He elevated my opinion of what I should expect or not expect of my kid and what is acceptable and not acceptable," says one mother. "Why shouldn't our kids be treated like other athletes—why shouldn't we expect more out of our kids?"

Late last month, Special Olympics Texas approved the formation of a new delegation made up of former members of the Flower Mound Mustangs, meaning those children who were caught between two warring groups.

of parents will now have a place to play.

Steve Fleming, however, says he will not be joining them. If he has any regrets, it is that he became involved in the organization in the first place.

He knows he offended many people, but he remains unapologetic. His focus, he says, is on his son. Soon, the boy will be old enough to strike out on his own. What will take place if something happens to his father and mother and he has no one to care for him? The thought terrifies Fleming.

"I'm in a position in my life right now where it's simple, either you're an asset or you're a liability. With my son there's no question, I want the best for him. And if you're not giving him that and you're not getting out of the way for people that can do that, you and I are going to have problems."

Right now, the boy is in a good place. He's at a high school where his principal and his teachers are responsive to all his needs. Every week, Fleming says, his son's teachers brief him on the boy's progress. Fleming has put the same enthusiasm he directed toward the Special Olympics into helping the school: Not long ago he convinced a local business to donate \$17,000 in computer equipment to the special education department.

Sometimes, when he gets off work early, he heads over to Hebron High to watch his son play football. He can't believe how well the boy is progressing. And the best part is that his teammates consider him one of their own.

He insists that he wants nothing more to do with the Special Olympics, but sometimes when the anger over his suspension subsides, when he remembers how things were in the beginning, you have to wonder.

"I remember the first team I ever coached and that girl came up to me and never had a decent pair of shoes and she cried because I got her a pair. I been with a girl last year, I'll never forget this. She never got a hit. All the games, all the practices, she never got a hit. We go to state games, two people on base, two outs, she got a double and I went crazy.

"All that work you do, you don't think they can do it, and every time they step up."

The old Marine, the man known for yelling and trash talk, pauses to compose himself. "I get worked up just thinking about it," he says. "For these kids, it was the first time they had ever been treated like real athletes. And the saddest part is, because of a lot of bureaucracy and red tape and parents who didn't get what we were trying to do, they're never going to get to feel that again. We could've created something beautiful."

Show Page

[Write Your Comment](#)

[show comment](#)

[Home Personal Protection](#)

Free ADT ® Security System - Special Online Offer - Learn More.
www.ADT.com

[Become a Bodyguard](#)

Earn your A.A.S. or B.S. in Private Security 100% online!
www.kaplandegrees-online.com

