

# Athlete remains undaunted by handicap

By Elena M. Camblo  
Freelance writer

ELMIRA — Jamie Mele would make a perfect candidate for the Nike shoe company's campaign, "Just Do It."

"If you want to do something bad enough, you'll find a way, no matter what," asserted Mele, who will graduate from Elmira Notre Dame High School on June 25.

"Finding a way" has been Mele's credo his entire life, for with a prosthesis on his right leg and a disfigured right hand, he has heard all too often the phrase "you can't do it."

Mele's right leg was missing a bone at the time of his birth. Doctors told his parents that an amputation would become necessary for Mele when he was 16 years old.

"My parents decided to let me have the operation when I was 5, instead," Mele said.

Since that operation, in which his right leg was amputated above the knee, Mele has inspired those around him with his drive to excel.

In February of this year, Mele was inducted into the Chemung County Youth Hall of Fame. He was nominated by Sister Mary Walter Hickey,

RSM, principal of the Catholic high school located at 1400 Maple Ave.

Mike D'Aloisio, Notre Dame's vice principal and athletic director, described Mele's special inspiration to the Elmira community.

"He's overcome a great deal of adversity and has never complained," D'Aloisio remarked. "He's worked hard during football practice at all times, when I don't think anyone else could have withstood the pain. Sometimes the skin under the prosthesis would be rubbed to the bone and even become infected, but he'd never let up, not even if we asked him to."

Mele was a four-year member of the Notre Dame football program, finishing at the varsity level his final two seasons. He also competed in lacrosse and wrestling, and serves as a coach for Small Fry football in Elmira.

Being allowed to compete athletically was a determining factor in Mele's choice to attend Notre Dame.

"The public schools would not let me play sports because of my disability. They made up something about it being a state law. I was pretty mad about it," Mele acknowledged.



Ruth Adams  
Jamie Mele, a three-sport athlete at Elmira Notre Dame High School, became a member of the Chemung County Youth Hall of Fame in February.

"But Mr. D'Aloisio let me try out for JV football my freshman year."

As he nears graduation, Mele marvels how fast his high school years have passed.

"I'll remember the football team, and the closeness of our class. Notre Dame taught me how to be close with other people," he said.

One of Mele's closest friends, Jason Cresswell, will graduate with him later this month.

"I remember times when I was really down, and Jamie would always be there for me. He'd be there for anyone, really," recalled Cresswell.

A'don Allen, another Notre Dame senior, has been close friends with Mele for two years.

"He was great on the football team. He adds a lot of humor to football practice; he's a funny guy," said Allen. "People stopped making excuses when they saw him play. Earlier this year, I was having difficulties with track, making excuses. He said 'If I could do it, I'd love to.' I think he realizes he's an inspiration to others, even though he doesn't show it."

According to Mele, his ins-  
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"I stopped in for a visit and stayed four years"



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