

Warmup

Class Act

Track and field star David Oliver is giving a group of kids an up-close look at his journey to the Olympics

David Oliver, an Olympic bronze medalist and the U.S.-record holder in the 110-meter hurdles, has a secret weapon as he goes for gold at this year's London Games:

Mrs. Kivelson's fifth-grade class at the 51st Avenue Academy in Queens, New York. Oliver mentors the students as part of Classroom Champions, a program that connects kids with top athletes to teach them about hard work, goal setting, and perseverance. But he has also gotten a big boost from the kids, who are cheering him on as he trains for the Olympics. Since last October, Oliver has held Skype chats with the class, sharing stories about his training and inspiring the students to excel in the classroom, while they encourage him to do the same on the track. In January, Oliver met Mrs. Kivelson's class in person for the first time, at a meet at Madison Square Garden. The students, who have become his biggest fans, welcomed him with signs and cheers. Oliver spoke with *SI KIDS* about what it's been like to have the classroom share each step of his Olympic quest with him.

“It's been a great experience to film videos for the kids and video chat with them, showing them what I am doing during my track season. I try my best to be a positive role model and show them that if they work hard they can achieve any goal. I didn't start out as an Olympic-type athlete. In high school and early in college, I wasn't the best, but I worked hard and never gave up. I've lost more times than I've won. You have to learn from your mistakes and keep moving forward. If a student is struggling with math, I urge them to keep working hard so they can ace that test. I try to motivate them, and they do the same for me.

When I don't have a good training session or am discouraged, I remember the kids and how much they are supporting me. [In April] the class made a video wishing me a happy birthday. One of the



Cheering Section
A fifth-grade class is rooting for Oliver every step of the way as he goes for gold.



girls shared a poem in the video. That meant the world to me. It's a great feeling to have these kids encouraging me and wishing me well.

One of the coolest moments of my season was meeting the class in January. Unfortunately, I came in second [in the 50-meter hurdles at the U.S. Open track meet]. I was a little down about it, but when I walked [back out to the] track and saw them, my mood changed. They erupted with cheers and had banners they held up during my race. We took pictures and talked a lot. Their excitement and energy is just what I needed. They made me feel like I was the best even on a day when I wasn't.

My goal is to make it to London and bring home a gold medal. I want to win. You won't go far in life without any help. But with hard work, dedication, and support from people like Mrs. Kivelson's students, I believe I can do that.”

Go to SIKIDS.com/Oliver to send David Oliver a good luck message as he trains for the Olympics!

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