



Introducing Cindy Klassen & Israel Idonije

POWER, SPEED and Grace in Motion

MANITOBA IS BLESSED WITH MANY GREAT ATHLETES. Whether in professional or amateur sports, the province is making its mark on the ice, on the grass and in the gym in Canada and around the world. But two athletes – each from a different part of the province and in different sports – have captured audiences everywhere. And what is the key to their success? Well, among things like big dreams, great work ethics and supportive families, they are in a constant state of motion – always moving ahead.

Cindy

IF YOU HAVE EVER THOUGHT THAT GOAL SETTING WASN'T A GOOD IDEA, CHECK THIS OUT.

At the 2006 Olympic Winter Games, Cindy Klassen – a Winnipeg native who graduated from Mennonite Brethren Collegiate and now lives in Calgary – became the first Canadian to win five medals at a single Winter Olympics. She won a Gold, two Silver and two Bronze in Speed Skating. Cindy then went on to capture the Overall World Cup Title in the 3000m

race and won the World All-round Championships with a golden sweep of all four distances.

But that's not all. In 2005 she won the 1500m World Cup Title and became a double Gold medallist at the World Championships. Cindy also captured an Olympic Bronze medal in 2002 and she became the first Canadian in 27 years to win the overall title at the 2003 World All-round Speed Skating Championships.

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Cindy earned the 2006 Lou Marsh Award as Canadian Athlete of the Year and she is the most decorated Canadian Olympic athlete in history. Needless to say, Cindy is all about setting goals and working hard to achieve them.

“My dream in high school was to qualify for the Canadian Women’s Olympic hockey team,” said Klassen. “I had some great teachers at Mennonite Brethren Collegiate and they really cared about their students so I had lots of encouragement. I started playing hockey when I was four, and I really looked up to my older cousin Mark who also played hockey. He was

an inspiration to me, and I always wanted to make the same teams that he did,” she added.

Before Cindy became hooked on speed skating, she showed promise in a number of other sports. She competed for Canada in In-line Skating at the 1999 PanAm Games and before that was a member of Canada’s National Junior Women’s Hockey Team in 1996. As a 15 year old, Cindy competed for Canada at the 1994 Commonwealth Games as a member of the women’s Field Lacrosse Team.

Cindy’s success didn’t come without hours of hard work, sacrifice and some pain. “In 2003, I fell during training and cut my arm on another skater’s blade,” she said. “The accident took me out of skating for a couple of months and I missed quite a few

World Cup races. Although it was hard to sit around and do nothing, I was fortunate to be able to spend a lot of time with my family, and when I did get back to skating, I felt hungry to race again.”

“It’s exciting to look back on all the good memories of competing and achieving goals,” said Klassen. “I couldn’t have done it without my coach, my team-mates and my family and I thought of them all as I stood on the podium and our national anthem played.”

Cindy’s advice for youth is; “Dream big, and believe in yourself. Know that if you stick to something you can do it, even if you are struggling. It’s that belief in yourself that will pull you through when times get tough.” ●



“BELIEVE IN YOURSELF. KNOW THAT IF YOU STICK TO SOMETHING YOU CAN DO IT, EVEN IF YOU ARE STRUGGLING. IT’S THAT BELIEF IN YOURSELF THAT WILL PULL YOU THROUGH WHEN TIMES GET TOUGH.”

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Izzy

HAVE YOU EVER SAID TO YOURSELF, 'WHY BOTHER TRYING? THERE'S NO WAY I WOULD EVER BE ABLE TO DO THAT'.

We have probably all said those kinds of things to ourselves at some time or another. But here's someone who meets every challenge in life with the words 'I can do it'. His name is Israel Idonije, or just Izzy to his friends, and he is a member of the Chicago Bears.

Idonije has the distinction of being the only Manitoban to ever make it to the National Football League (NFL). And growing up in Brandon – a community better known for turning out elite hockey players – Israel's accomplishments become even more impressive when you go back to where it all started.

Born in Lagos, Nigeria, Israel moved to Brandon at a young age and liked playing sports with his friends and classmates. "Basketball was my favourite sport," Idonije said. "In fact, I wrote in my Bible that I wanted to play pro basketball for the Chicago Bulls, just like my idol, Michael Jordan. I always say be careful what you wish for because it just might come true. Well, my dream of playing in Chicago was fulfilled except that I became a Bear and not a Bull."

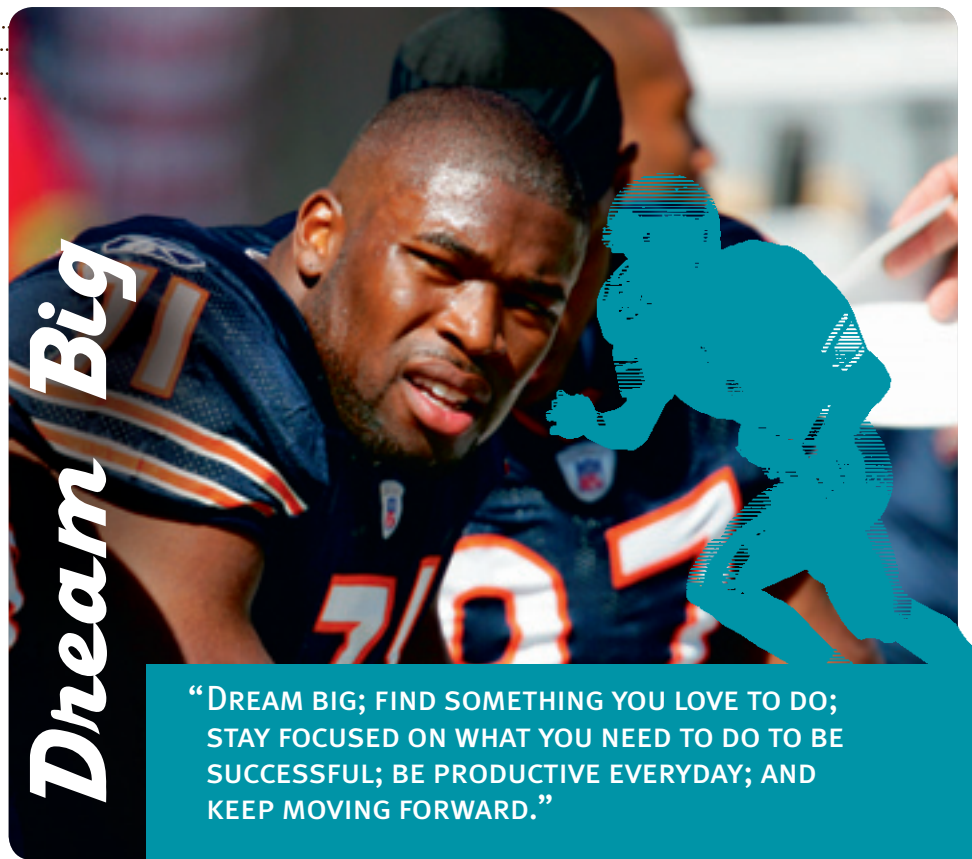
At Vincent Massey High School in Brandon, Israel's favourite class was drama

and he continued to play a variety of sports. It was during his high school years that he would start to believe that anything in life is possible – "If it's to be, it's up to me."

Israel played just one year of football for the Vincent Massey Vikings, in grade 12. It was while attending the University of Manitoba in 1999 that he decided to give the sport another try. He spent two seasons learning the game and focused his energy on getting stronger and faster. In his third year at the U of M, Israel not only made the starting line-up but he was selected as the Most Valuable Defensive Player in Canadian Interuniversity Sport.

Drafted by the Ottawa Renegades of the Canadian Football League in 2004, Israel chose instead to sign with the Chicago Bears as a free agent. He spent his first year in pro-football with the Berlin Thunder of NFL Europe where his team won a World Bowl championship. With a lot of hard work training in the gym and a burning desire to succeed, he made the final roster of the Chicago Bears in 2005.

Going from a nine-man football team in Brandon to the NFL took some getting used to. "I was a little 'star-struck' at first, but it wasn't too difficult," said Idonije. "A football team is pretty much like a fraternity. So



Dream Big

"DREAM BIG; FIND SOMETHING YOU LOVE TO DO; STAY FOCUSED ON WHAT YOU NEED TO DO TO BE SUCCESSFUL; BE PRODUCTIVE EVERYDAY; AND KEEP MOVING FORWARD."

when you make the team, you're a part of a group and the guys help you out and show you the ropes," added Idonije.

Israel's future plans include finishing his degree at the University of Manitoba and working with youth. "I've started a non-profit agency in Chicago called *Izzy's Kids*," said Idonije. "We focus on helping children from

under-privileged backgrounds get a head-start in school. I love working with kids."

His advice is simple: "Dream big; find something you love to do; stay focused on what you need to do to be successful; be productive everyday; and keep moving forward." ●

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