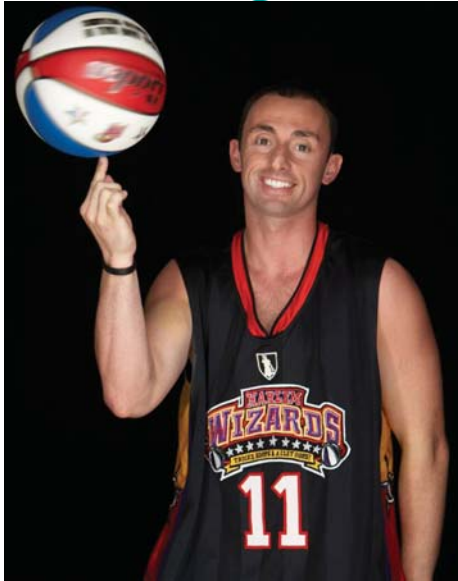


# Mighty Mike!

By Laura Apel



**M**ike Simmel has been a member of the Harlem Wizards professional basketball team and a featured show performer at halftimes since 2001. He was a standout on both his high school and college teams and has performed on NBC's "It's Showtime at The Apollo," at the NBA's "Rhythm n' Rims" Festival, and at both NBA and college halftime shows. He is a crowd favorite, performing eye-pleasing tricks with the basketball and has a natural gift when working with children. Mike Simmel also has epilepsy.

Diagnosed when he was two-years-old, Mike's epilepsy first affected him when his slow motor skills and seizures led to his placement in a special education gym class. At age seven, his father gave him a basketball to see if working with the ball would help him overcome his motor skills issues, and they both soon realized the important role that the sport would play in Mike's life.

After his introduction to basketball, Mike initially outgrew his drop attacks, but his seizures came back as he grew older. However, it wasn't until he was 16-years-old that Mike first learned the social aspects of his disability. He was attending a basketball camp and had a seizure, but what happened next surprised him and changed his life forever. Mike was asked to leave the camp. Upset by the decision, Mike called his father to tell him what had happened. Knowing his son's capabilities better than anyone, Mr. Simmel insisted Mike remain in the camp and not be deprived of an experience that other children

were allowed. Mike went on to finish the camp and later have an extremely successful high school and college basketball career where he was a two-year team captain at Purchase College, leading the team in assists and steals before graduating with a degree in Liberal Studies in May 2002. Mike now a healthy 29-year-old who makes his living as a professional basketball player. But it was that day at camp when he was asked to leave that truly changed Mike – and made him realize how many kids are missing out on valuable experiences because of their disabilities. He decided to do something about that.

When Mike was asked to leave camp because of his seizure, he felt sad because he knew the coach didn't understand his disability. He decided to begin hosting his own camps so that there would be a place where kids like him could have fun—kids who, as he explains, "do not have serious disabilities but who are in-between and may have epilepsy or ADD/ADHD—kids who have a condition that affects the way they live." His main goal was that kids have a great week where they gain self-confidence and then, if they choose to, attend a

more mainstream camp the following year.

Throughout the past eight years, Mike has lectured and performed at over 350 basketball camps including Georgia Tech, Villanova, Boston College, Seton Hall, Providence, Rutgers, Dana Barros Basketball Camp, Hoop Mountain, Chris Ford Basketball School and other leading college, high school, youth, and specialty boys and girl's basketball camps throughout the east coast. He is now a national spokesman for Epilepsy Awareness and speaks and performs annually at the Epilepsy Foundation of America's Kids Speak Up and U.S. Public Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. He has appeared at Epilepsy Foundation and special needs camps in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Massachusetts and Tennessee. Mike has also been selected as the keynote speaker for several Epilepsy Foundation affiliated events across the country and was the Honorary Chairman of the 2006 Walk for A Brighter Tomorrow in conjunction with the Epilepsy Foundation of NJ/Family Resource Network. He constantly looks to donate his time and talents, encouraging and advocating for people, especially children, who have epilepsy and other disabilities.

Mike has also created the Bounce Out the Stigma™ Program as a youth outreach campaign geared toward giving all children and young people a chance to learn using basketball as the primary vehicle to overcome obstacles in life. The program's purpose is for children to gain confidence and "bounce-out" their limitations to empower themselves. Mike wants children to develop communication channels with parents, doctors, and loved ones, always with the goal of becoming the best they can be.

Mike Simmel has overcome a great deal of obstacles, and with his camp lectures and exhibitions, halftime shows and special events, assembly programs and motivational speaking, he is showing kids of all ages and abilities that they too can achieve their dreams. •

For information on Mike Simmel and his upcoming events, basketball camps, appearances, or to request him as an event speaker, contact him through his website [www.mightymikebasketball.com](http://www.mightymikebasketball.com) or [www.bounceoutthestigma.com](http://www.bounceoutthestigma.com).