

# Schimmel

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plays for the Atlanta Dream. "I'm living the dream," Schimmel said, grinning at the intentional pun. Wednesday's footage came when Schimmel and Griner clashed during the NCAA women's tournament. Griner starred for Baylor University at the time and went on to become the top draft pick with the Phoenix Mercury.

In her first pro season, Schimmel carted off the 2014 WNBA All-Star Most Valuable Player (MVP) honors. And she's looking forward to the future.

The Wagner appearance followed Tuesday's visit to neighboring Marty Indian School. The Wagner visit was arranged by Vanessa Iversen, the Wagner school's cultural coordinator, and Glenn Drapeau with South Dakota GEAR UP.

Schimmel and her family were featured in the documentary "Off The Rez," which chronicled her life's journey.

"It hasn't always been easy, but my family has been there for me," she said. "Listen to your elders. They understand the difference between right from wrong. They have made mistakes and learned from them."

Schimmel said her family has tried to live a normal lifestyle despite the fame.

"We are human (beings). We are normal people who try to be better," she said. "We are positive about what we want to do. Always be positive. See the positive

situation. You don't always win, but life goes on."

She admitted she didn't take academics as seriously during high school. However, that changed when she arrived at college.

"I learned that, when it comes to student-athlete, the 'student' part comes first," she said. "In high school, I got by but wasn't as good (in the classroom) as I should have been. Now, I ask my younger brothers and sisters, 'Have you finished your homework?' Finish your education and do good in school, and it will work out for you in the end."

Schimmel urged the Wagner students to stay away from drugs and alcohol.

"I'm 22, and I don't drink," she said. "There's a reason why underage drinking is illegal, why they want you to wait until you're 21. It's not good at a young age, it's not good for your body. And drugs — they're illegal for a reason."

During high school, she focused on basketball tournaments rather than dances and parties. Basketball not only kept her out of trouble, it also provided a healthy lifestyle and ultimately led to her pro career.

She alluded to the intense competition for getting — and staying — in professional basketball.

"There are only 12 teams in the WNBA, and only 12 players on a team," she said. "I don't want someone taking my job."

Schimmel's fame has brought attention to her heritage, where she still battles stereotypes about Indians. She pointed to American Indian athletes Jim Thorpe and Billy Mills as her



RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) star Shoni Schimmel receives a traditional star quilt during Wednesday's program at the Wagner school theater. Schimmel and her parents spoke about their life's journey, which was captured in the documentary "Off The Rez."

inspirations. Appropriately, Tuesday marked the 50th anniversary of Mills — from the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota — winning his gold medal in track at the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

"They paved the path for me, and I'm paving the path for younger athletes," she said.

At the Wagner program, she was joined at the podium by her parents, Rick Schimmel and Ceci Moses. The couple offered moral support for their daughter, the second of eight children. However, the parents also offered encouragement for the Wagner youths, both Native and non-Native.

Rick is white, while Ceci is American Indian. "Shoni understands both worlds," Rick said.

"We're lucky to have a lot of support in Indian

Country," Rick Schimmel said. "We want to share our life story. Hopefully, it will inspire you."

Rick Schimmel noted his family's reservation was filled with poverty. However, his daughter has proven that success can be found amidst any circumstances with hard work and dedication.

"You can do whatever you want regardless of where you are in life," he said. "If you want it bad enough, you can go for it."

Shoni and her sister, Jude, have traveled widely through basketball. They have traveled to Japan, Canada and Mexico. Shoni competed for Team USA in the World University Games, winning a gold medal in Russia.

"At 7 years old, Shoni's dream was to play pro basketball," Rick said. "There

was only the NBA at the time, but then came the WNBA and that was what she wanted to be. She has traveled the world and found a lot of opportunities."

Rick urged the Wagner students to find their niche in life. "Find your passion, whether it's the arts, computer, basketball. If you love to do it, follow your dreams," he said.

Jude skipped eighth grade so she could play high school basketball with Shoni. Despite the doubts about her skipping a grade, Jude graduated from high school with a 3.86 grade point average. Jude completed her bachelor's degree at Louisville in three years, and now she's working on her master's degree.

"Challenge yourself in life to be the best you can be," Rick said.

Rick spoke of throwing himself into the reservation community as a white man.

"The Native community is awesome. It has compassion and heart," he said. "If you're non-Native, educate yourself and know the truth out there about the Native history and life. Embrace it. We will be stronger together than separated."

Ceci Moses said she became a young mother, which brought many challenges. She encouraged the Wagner students to overcome challenges in their lives.

"Take care of yourself, go to college. Have fun and great experiences, but also get a good education and work hard," she said.

She encouraged the students to follow a healthy lifestyle with good nutrition and exercise, and to pursue their education and develop

a reading habit. She also encouraged them to respect their parents and other elders.

"If you give them respect, it will come back to you," she said. "Be good to other people. If you become a good person, it comes back to you. Whatever you put out, you give back to yourself."

In answering audience questions, Shoni said one of her most difficult moments was recovering from a broken ankle during high school. However, she persevered and resumed her athletics.

Shoni had overcome other physical challenges, as her parents were told she would never walk or run well — then she began walking at age 1.

She credited her parents with keeping her humble, with Shoni and Jude drawing praise from the doorman at their hotel following the All-Star game for their politeness.

"My parents have done a great job about not getting caught up in fame and glory," she said. "I meet people who are snobby, and nobody likes a snobby person. I want to be somebody different."

Shoni also credits her religious faith for keeping her on the right path.

"I talked to the Creator and asked, 'What should I be doing?'" she said. "If I'm here for a reason, let me do that reason."

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at [twitter.com/RDockendorf](https://twitter.com/RDockendorf). Discuss this story at [www.yankton.net](http://www.yankton.net).

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