

BIOGRAPHY OF DARNELL HALL

Motivated, inspired and blessed describes Think Detroit PAL's Officer Darnell Hall, a 1992 Olympic Gold Medallist in the 4x400 Relays. Since his Olympic triumphs, Darnell has savored Olympic glory, recovered from Olympic disappointment and empowered the youth of Detroit to be the best they can be.

Darnell is currently the Commissioner of Think Detroit PAL's track & field program and Think Detroit PAL Football, one of the largest football programs in the nation. He is also the Chairman for the Michigan Association Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) Athletics program which governs track & field in the state of Michigan. In addition, he has been added to the National AAU Track & Field Executive Committee, National Meet Management Staff for the AAU Junior Olympic Games Committee and Security Liaison for the National AAU during the Junior Olympic Games.

He has accomplished all of this by adhering to what he calls the four Ds, "Determination, Dedication, Desire and Discipline". According to Darnell, he states, "that is why I succeeded on the national and Olympic levels, that's why I was able to bounce back, and that's why I'm still motivated to excel. You've got to have those four qualities to succeed in track and field, but more importantly, to succeed in life.

Darnell admits that he is fortunate to have lived his dreams. The memories of the guys and girls from the Detroit neighborhood that did not make it, is a constant reminder of where he could have ended up if his parents had not enrolled him in the Police Athletic League (PAL) when he was just eight. It remains his greatest driving force today because he can look around the old neighborhood and see some of those guys and girls on drugs, in prison or mentally beaten by life. It reminds him that he can never become complacent.

In high school, Darnell's dream was to play football, but his high school coach recognized his God-given talents even before Darnell did. He steered him toward the track, and Darnell admits that it was one of the best things anyone has ever done for him. Darnell took to the sport like a man possessed which led him to the Olympics in Barcelona, Spain. He states it took years of preparation and lots of competition to develop into one of the best runners in the U.S. and the World.

Competing against high-caliber athletes starting at the college level really helped Darnell develop. He attended one of the best track and field schools in the country—Blinn College in Brennum Texas, where just about everyone was an All-American. Enjoying great college success, Darnell knew he was fast enough to be an Olympian. Getting there however, required a tremendous amount of focus and practice.

Darnell credits his competitors for helping him achieve success. One of his toughest, Michael Johnson inspired him to try even harder. He went out hard every time he faced him. He ran the best race he could and forced Michael to be perfect. Darnell

stresses that to his athletes of the Think Detroit PAL track & Field program that when running against the best, one has to adopt that mentality.

On the field, Darnell puts the kids through a myriad of warm-up and applied drills, but focuses a lot more on motivating them to believe in themselves. To prepare them for life's challenges, he encourages the Think Detroit PAL youth to talk to him or the coaching staff, but if not them, someone. He assures the kids that no matter what their home life, neighborhood or family situations are, not to run from it – but face it. It will help to build their characters. He also reassures the youth that there are people in their community who care about them. The people who show up to their schools to see how they are doing, attend their games to cheer them on, compliment them for doing good and let them know when they are not, are the people that truly care. Darnell also encourages the Think Detroit PAL kids to believe in themselves and understand that things don't always go as planned, but by working hard and staying true to themselves, everything will be all right.

Darnell is a living testament to that and his success with Think Detroit PAL speaks volumes to his goals to revitalize track and field in Detroit. He began with just an outdoor track program in 1999 and 20 kids. Today, the outdoor and indoor track and field program serves 560 participants annually, who hail from all over the City of Detroit. Through hard work and dedication to AAU, Darnell has grown the Michigan AAU Athletics program from 200 athletes to over 1500. Since his appointment Darnell has been instrumental in building what is now the second largest track & field association of participants within the country as well as hosting one of the largest youth track and field meets of 10,000 athletes at Eastern Michigan University.

Like Darnell did as a young boy, some have Olympic aspirations, others have collegiate goals and others just want to run, throw, hurdle or jump. Darnell's goals for the PAL Track & Field and the AAU Program include increasing awareness of the sport in Michigan and around the country, developing a year-round indoor facility for meets and practice, bringing regional and national meets to the city and creating track and field scholarship opportunities for not just Think Detroit PAL youth but all that participate in the sport.

Darnell is married with 3 children. When he is not spending time with his family, he can be found hosting indoor and outdoor track events during the winter and summer as well as a charter school track & field league during the spring with his wife Karen Hall. His idea in increasing the awareness and exposure of track & field has created many opportunities for area youth. To contact Darnell for more information please call (313) 445-4002 or email khall@vistamaria.org.