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## 'You can't let it stop you'

**A teacher and author who's received his share of rejection letters tells students that success requires perseverance and hard work.**

*By Melissa Slager  
Herald Writer*

EVERETT - John Foley held up a 3-inch thick stack of letters rejecting his manuscript, then gave one of them a good wallop with his fist.

Foley, an English teacher at Cascade High School, likes to give his students some advice: "Don't listen to the 'putdown predators.'"

And the stack of letters is proof.

Foley's young adult novel, "Hoops of Steel," was published this month by a Minnesota-based company - eight years after its completion.

Teachers often tend to stress to students the need to succeed, Foley said.

"We don't quite warn you you're going to hit some bumps along the way," he said. "You can't let it stop you."

Foley took a day off Monday from his teaching duties to speak to about 500 English students, who rotated through the school library to hear his story.

The journalist-turned-teacher said he has always loved writing.

As a newspaper reporter in the Chicago suburbs and Alaska, he wrote about anything that would keep him from meetings about sanitary sewers - crossing paths with people whose quirks and situations fed his creative writing.

He later turned to teaching, starting out in Alaskan villages, where his experiences resulted in his first published book, the memoir "Tundra Teacher."

Foley has taught for 13 years, the last seven at Cascade. And he continues to write.

During the school year he writes in 15-minute bursts each morning until he can devote longer chunks of time to the craft in summer months.

It took about three years to complete "Hoops."



**Michael O'Leary / The Herald**

Cascade High School teacher John Foley speaks to an English class about his book "Hoops of Steel."

"I just always wanted to be a writer," Foley said. "I come from a big Irish-Catholic family. We love to sit around and tell stories."

Then there's the creative rush of energy that comes with sharing what he's written.

The message for students: "If they can find a career and follow that bliss, it leads to a lot of satisfaction, personally and professionally."

"Hoops of Steel" tells the story of Jackson O'Connell, a high-schooler whose love of basketball helps him cope with family trauma and a senior year plagued by zits, shyness and team politics.

The book is loosely based on Foley's own basketball days, including second-string on a Division III junior varsity team.

Ysmael Abad, 16, is reading "Hoops" as part of a sophomore English class.

"It's exciting," he said.

Abad's favorite part so far is when Jackson learns to dunk. But Abad said he's also learning some life lessons from characters, such as planning for a future beyond high school.

English teacher Steve Garmanian said there was much for students to learn from Foley, even if they don't read the book.

"It's the humanizing of teachers, understanding that teachers are people who have passions and interests that go beyond our contact time with students in the classroom," Garmanian said.

"Hoops" contains profanity, scenes with nudity and touches on sensitive topics, such as abuse.

As a teacher, Foley said he goes back and forth on such things as profanity. It's not something he allows in his classes, for example. But high school athletes can have some pretty foul mouths, he said.

"In the end, I tend to lean toward realism," he said.

"Hoops of Steel" is 233 pages and retails for \$8.95. You can learn more at [www.fluxnow.com](http://www.fluxnow.com).

Flux, a division of Llewellyn Publications, also plans to publish Foley's sequel to "Hoops," called "Running with the Wind," in August.

Reporter Melissa Slager: 425-339-3465 or [mslager@heraldnet.com](mailto:mslager@heraldnet.com).