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Mills Encourages Graduates to Overcome Perceptions

Billy Mills, one of Indian Country's greatest contemporary heroes, addressed Choctaw Central High School graduates during their graduation ceremony held on Tuesday, May 25, 2010, at the Silver Star Convention Center in Choctaw, MS.

Mills, an Oglala Lakota (Sioux) distance runner, was the 1964 Olympic gold medal winner in the 10,000 meter run. He is the second Native American to win an Olympic gold medal and the only American to win the gold in the 10,000 meter run.

Mills was introduced by Tribal Miko Beasley Denson. Before Mills addressed the students, a clip of his 1964 victory was shown to the audience. He then approached the podium and spoke about his life. He talked about how a person's life is filled with perceptions, how difficult it was for him to overcome perceptions growing up, and how he was still perceived negatively even after his historic victory. Through it all, Mills persevered, and he encouraged the graduates to do the same.

After his address, Miko Denson and the graduates presented him with gifts, which included a Choctaw basket, stickball sticks, and a ball.

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The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, under the esteemed leadership of Miko Beasley Denson, has an enrolled membership of over 10,000 and is the only federally recognized tribe in the State of Mississippi. Headquartered in the Pearl River community, near Philadelphia, Mississippi, the Tribe has emerged as a leader in economic development. The Tribe provides a range of governmental services for its members including schools, a hospital, medical clinics, police and fire protection, courts, an elderly center, among many others.