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Airman makes boro pitstop on way around world

Aviator from Miami aspires to be first black man to fly solo in single-engine plane around globe

BY CRAIG GIAMMONA

One day into his ambitious attempt to become the first black airman to fly solo around the world, 23-year-old Barrington Irving stopped in Queens to speak with local aviation students.

Irving, who could also become the youngest-ever solo pilot to circle the globe, said he hopes his rise from the violence-plagued streets of inner-city Miami to the skies above four of the world's continents will serve as an inspiration to students considering a career in aviation.

"I have no idea who this flight will inspire," Irving said at a news conference Monday at York College. "The reason I'm here, someone took time out for me. We need more people in the community directly working with students."

Irving took off Sunday from Miami and stopped in Queens Monday to meet

with students from August Martin High School, York College and Queens High School for the Sciences — three schools that host aviation programs. He embarked in earnest on his six-week voyage Tuesday from Republic Airport in Farmingdale, L.I.

Despite the fact that he is poised to set two world records, Irving downplayed the racial aspects of his voyage Monday, shy-ing away from comparisons to racial pioneers like Jackie Robinson and Tiger Woods.

"The same God that made you made me," Irving said, adding "you have to reach a level where you see past that."

Irving instead chose to focus on his tough upbringing in inner-city Miami. Born on the island of Jamaica, Irving came to Florida at age 6 and for years thought a football scholarship was his only way out of Miami. That path was clear: Irving be-



Barrington Irving is seeking to become the first African American to fly solo around the world.

Photo by Craig Giammona

came a star fullback at Miami Northwestern Senior High School and earned Division I football scholarship offers. But Irving gave it all up to pursue aviation.

Irving's interest in aviation about flying.

"I didn't think I was smart enough to be a pilot," Irving said. "From then on I was hooked. Flying was a passion I never knew I had."

Irving eventually graduated from high

school and turned down the scholarship offers in favor of attending a local community college. He also took a job washing planes at an airfield near his house. Irving eventually earned a scholarship to Florida Memorial University, where he is pursuing a degree in aeronautical science. Along the way, he also picked up several pilots licenses.

As of press time, Irving was somewhere over Canada, or possibly even the Atlantic Ocean.

In some ways, the journey Irving already has taken — from the Miami bookstore where he met his mentor to the pilot's seat of the \$600,000 single-engine plane he will pilot around the globe — was miles more than the one that lies ahead.

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