

Courtney Hall could tell Jaycey Haynes had *it*.

As coach of New Hope Dance Xpress, Hall knows the facial expressions and energy performers need to engage fans and crowds. Even though Hall was seeing Haynes as a freshman at a tryout for the squad, she said the 2020 graduates from Dance Xpress agreed with her and realized Haynes was going to make an impact.

“You can really tell dance is something she loves, and she has fun doing,” Hall said. “That comes across in her facial expressions when she performs. If the person who is performing is not having fun, the audience is not having fun.”

After showcasing her passion for dance at New Hope High School for the past four years, Haynes will get to perform on a new stage in the fall. On Friday morning, the New Hope High senior accepted a scholarship to be one of 17 members of the 2024-25 Itawamba Community College All-American Marching Band Indianettes.

“Pursuing my dream to dance in college, as soon as I got the opportunity I was going to take it,” Haynes said. “Whether it was ICC or a different college, I was going to take it.”

Haynes said getting an opportunity to dance at ICC will be even more special because her best friend, Shelby Sullivan, who goes to Hamilton Attendance Center, also will be a freshman

Indianette this fall. Three other friends also will attend ICC to help ease the transition from Columbus to Fulton.

Haynes said she spent “hours upon hours” improving her techniques and working through injuries and different setbacks to realize her dream to dance in college. As a sophomore, she said she injured her knee right before Dance Xpress’ spring show. A few months ago, she said she hurt her foot doing a turning disc but she pushed through that so she could perform at one of the school year’s last shows.

“Whenever I am dancing, everything I have in my mind goes away and I hear the music and it is another level of peace,” Haynes said.

Hall, who is in her seventh season as coach of Dance Xpress, credits the six seniors on the 2023-24 squad for working extremely well together. She said the other five seniors encouraged Haynes to pursue her goal to compete in college.

Hall also said Haynes did her part by putting in extra work to perfect her skills for tryouts. She said that mind-set helped Haynes mature into an all-around team member.

“She *really* worked, specifically her senior year,” Hall said. “Almost every day she would be like, ‘Look what I can do now’. She would send me videos and say, ‘Look at my headspring’, or she would tell me, ‘When I was practicing, I figured out I can do this.’”

Hall said Haynes is the fifth dancer to go on to college, and the third who will attend ICC, in her time as coach. She said another team member went to East Mississippi C.C. and another went to Northeast Mississippi C.C. Hall is confident Haynes' work ethic and energy will be contagious at ICC.

"She really worked to hone and perfect the skills used in each style of dance," Hall said. "She made sure she could do it all, and if she knew there was something she couldn't do, she worked and she didn't get defeated. She worked so she could be included in that skill whenever we performed."

Haynes feels work ethic is one of her strongest attributes and that it will serve her well if she has to learn more intricate routines or incorporate more tricks back to back to back or learn new techniques at ICC.

Regardless of what she is asked to do, Haynes will do *it* with a smile and plenty of energy because she loves dancing.

"I love challenging myself," Haynes said.