

Young Pilot Completes Round-The-World Flight

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BY ROBERT SAMUELS

It's official -- Barrington Irving is the youngest and first black person to fly solo around the world.

In his plane Inspiration, Irving touched down at Opa-locka Executive Airport at 10:26 a.m. Wednesday. The journey ended 95 days of traversing throughout Europe, the Middle East and Asia, battling weather and fatigue.

But Irving's first struggle was between doubt and his dream. Growing up in Miami Gardens, Irving said he was surrounded by negativity. His peers were getting shot or shooting up and getting arrested. He came from a healthy, God-fearing family -- but thought the only option to succeed was to become a football player.

At 15, Irving found his role model in United Airlines pilot Capt. Gary Robinson. Robinson was black like him, Jamaican like him. He said he felt that if Robinson could fly, he could fly.

At 19, Irving got his pilot's license. And soon he started getting these fantasies about flying around the world. Some of his classmates, Irving said, thought he was a little crazy.

But Irving said he wanted to see the world, and he wanted the world to see that an inner-city youth can accomplish anything with enough determination. Plus, he hoped that one day he would inspire a child to be a pilot, as Robinson did for him.

Eventually, Irving amassed \$1.2 million worth of sponsorships and the plane. He took off March 23, and the world followed him on his journeys from Opa-locka.

In Manchester, England, 36-year-old Michael Dennis found Irving's story online. He was so inspired that he said he contacted British newspaper agencies.

"We really need something like this in the UK to inspire our young people away from crime," Dennis said. "Ever since I saw a 747 at Dublin Airport when I was a child, I always wanted to be an airline pilot with Aer Lingus but the chances never came to me so I have been inspired by Barrington to study as much as I can on Flight Simulator X and maybe take up flying lessons."

Retha Boone, director of the Miami-Dade black affairs advisory board, said the organization plans to give Irving its Pillar Award for community service in September.

"The very first time I saw him is when he was ready to take off," Boone said. "I saw such confidence and determination. At 23. At 23! When I was 23, I didn't know what I was going to do with my life."