

Disabled athletes head for competition

By Sandra Armbruster
editor

JOHAN SACCO can run the 100-meter dash in 24.80 seconds. That's about the equivalent of crossing the yards of five suburban houses in less than half a minute. But the surprising thing about Sacco is that he does it on crutches.

Sacco isn't alone in his achievement. The former Garden City resident is one of 11 athletes from Michigan who are attending the 1984 International Games for the Disabled beginning Sunday in New York. Michigan's athletes are part of the 80-member U.S. team which has been in training this week at the West Point Military Academy.

And the team is bent on winning. "This is my first International Games after five years (of training)," Sacco said. "I'd like to think it was all worth it."

His training partner and fellow team member, Shawn Graham of Inkster, "expects a couple of medals" from the experience.

"I've spent a couple of years in training with this the end goal," he said. "I don't expect it to come to naught."

GRAHAM and Sacco are among five Michigan team members who play with the Tri-City Seals, a cerebral palsy sports team sponsored by the cities of Westland, Garden City and Wayne. Two other members of the Michigan delegation to the international meet play with the Mighty Oaks, one of three teams for athletes who are disabled sponsored by the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission. Three Michigan players are from the Lansing Capitals, and the final team member is from the Sterling Heights Challengers.

Unlike special olympics, in which ev-

eryone is encouraged to participate and everyone receives a medal, athletes must qualify for the International Games, according to Portia Fields-Anderson, therapeutic recreation supervisor for the Oakland County Parks and Recreation Commission.

"These athletes are just as competitive as those who are able-bodied," she said.

"Some are just more physically challenged," added Jeff Jones, sports and recreation supervisor for United Cerebral Palsy Association (UCPA) of Detroit. Jones is one of six coaches accompanying the Michigan contingent.

"They train, sweat, bruise and bleed. They get tired and cop out. You have to coax them, just like able-bodied athletes," he said.

"But there's one major difference," Jones noted. "They seem to appreciate (the chance to compete) a lot more."

ALL OF THE athletes have been training locally since November according to a set schedule designed by the U.S. team coaches. Margo Maddox, for instance, trains with other Tri-City Seals members. In preparation for the 100-meter dash, Maddox's workouts include running the 100-yard dash in 22 seconds with a 30-second rest period in between.

"She covers the 100 meters, but the rest intervals help her develop a pace for the race," explained Marybeth Watkins-Jones, head coach of the Tri-City Seals. "We aim at a mark better than last year's first place in the national games."

At home in Detroit, Maddox trains by running in place with an eight-pound weight in each hand to build upper body strength.

Other athletes participating in cycling and weightlifting events, which are held during the second week of competition, train so they will be "at their peak" for the games, Watkins-Jones added.

KURT KRUEGER of the Mighty Oaks is one of the bruised athletes on the team.

"Normally he throws the shot put," Jones said. "But his horse fell on him in a riding accident last year, and his shoulder is still mending."

So Krueger will concentrate on equestrian and ambulatory soccer events.

Another injured athlete was Sacco whose hand was fractured during the April national games when it was run over by another athlete in wheelchair soccer competition.

"It's coming along fine," Sacco said. Riding and cycling are both "equalizers" when it comes to disabilities, Jones said. The athletes are ranked according to classes, which designate levels of disability from minimally involved to the use of electric wheelchairs. They then compete according to class.

ERIK Benjamin, 19, of Westland, whose favorite sport is swimming, worries about being considered the "baby" of the Michigan group.

"I'm just going to tell them I'm 19," he said.

Maddox wants to meet her "pals" from the international teams.

And Graham and Sacco leave about wanting to see the "blonds from Denmark." Turning a bit more serious, Sacco promises to win the discus.

"You have to learn to do it first," Graham retorts.

"It's an excellent program. I've watched them excel socially and physically. They become so well-rounded when they become involved," Watkins-Jones said. "Now they have the opportunity to excel or pass their peers."

Other members of the Michigan contingent are Amy Wagner of the Mighty Oaks, Candy Demaree of the Tri-City Seals, Mary Lou Baranski from the Sterling Heights Challengers, and Jane Spitzley, Kathy Kessler and Nancy Anderson from the Lansing Capitals.

Veterans started program

By Sandra Armbruster
editor

Michigan athletes who participate in therapeutic recreation programs can thank World War II veterans for providing the impetus behind sports for the disabled.

"We've come a long way," said Jeff Jones, sports and recreation supervisor for United Cerebral Palsy of Detroit.

Rehabilitation of veterans disabled during the war was fragmented at best during the early years, according to John M. Dunn, an associate professor of physical education at Oregon State University. Dunn outlined the history of therapeutic recreation during a speech in 1980 before the National Association for Physical Education.

To provide a team-oriented approach to treatment, the British opened the Spinal Injuries Center at Stoke Mandeville Hospital during 1944. Wheelchair polo was the first competitive team sport for paraplegics, with wheelchair basketball following in 1945.

In the United States, the first disabled veterans to form a sports team were the Flying Wheels of California in 1946.

THE FIRST international competition, between the British and Dutch, was played in 1952 among paralyzed veterans. By 1960, 400 men and women from 23 nations played in the first international games to be held outside of England.

National Wheelchair Games began in

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Woman found dead victim of cirrhosis

"Foul play has been ruled out in the death of a Union Lake woman who was found dead in her car on June 6 in the T-3 Maxx parking lot, according to Farmington police.

"While on patrol in the south lot of T-3 Maxx, Officer Mike Wiechert found Marion J. Callahan, 55, slumped over in her car about 8:30 p.m. Although attempts were made to revive the woman, she was pronounced dead at Potawatomi General Hospital at about 8:30 p.m.

Oakland County medical examiners determined that Callahan died of natural causes, most likely cirrhosis of the

liver, according to Farmington police.

When Callahan was found, an unoccupied fifth of vodka was also in the car, according to police. Because food, empty bottles of beer and vodka and articles of clothing were also found, police believe Callahan was living in her car.

A T.J. Maxx security guard told police she saw what was believed to be Callahan's car drive through the parking lot at about 6 p.m.

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