

Paraplegic from Indy is one of the nation's most celebrated disabled water skiers



Dan Reed holds some medals. "I'm an elite water skier," Reed said. "And I don't think I would've been that in my able-bodied days."

# NOTHING GETS IN HIS WAY



Paraplegic water skier Dan Reed, 55, Indianapolis, is a member of the current U.S. Disabled Water Ski Team that will compete at the World Disabled Water Ski Championships, starting Thursday in West Chester, Ohio.

MATT DETRICH / THE STAR

**By Kristine Guerra**

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**I**t was 34 degrees in the summer of 2004 in Fergus Falls, Minn. Dan Reed was moments away from performing his first-ever ski jump at his first-ever national competition.

He held the rope handle tightly by his legs. He squared up his shoulders. He focused on the top left corner of the 5-foot-tall ramp in front of him. He could not see the water behind the ramp — be-



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cause he was sitting down.

And he was sitting down because he can't stand up.

Reed was a petrified paraplegic on the verge of another in a series of life-changing moments.

The boat took off. He slid up the slippery ramp at nearly 30 mph. He flew up

to about 28 feet above the water. He landed.

"Perfectly," said his coach, John Kniesly. "All three times."

From that day forward, Dan Reed became known as "the jumper."

In the years since that cold summer day in Minnesota, the 55-year-old Indianapolis man has become one of the nation's most celebrated disabled water skiers.

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# THE INDIANAPOLIS

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is,  
there is liberty" II COR. 3:17

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## STAR

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 24, 2011  
\$1.00 ★ CITY EDITION

### Skier

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He has won several medals in national and world championships and is a member of the current U.S. Disabled Water Ski Team that will compete at the World Disabled Water Ski Championships, held Thursday through Sunday in West Chester, Ohio.

Reed's journey to these championships can be traced all the way back to 1978.

Reed, then a 22-year-old recreational water skier, was working for an Eastside company that installs loading dock levelers when a 3,500-pound steel plate fell on his back.

He recalls being under the plate and telling himself, "Well, looks like I'm not going to water-ski next weekend."

Reed's lower limbs suffered immediate paralysis. But it wasn't permanent.

After a year of intensive therapy, Reed regained his ability to walk — and water-ski.

"That was the biggest thrill I've ever experienced," he said, "knowing that I was able to get back on the water."

Then, in 2000, came another life-changing moment. He was playing volleyball and broke the fibula in his right leg.

This time, in part because of complications from his first injury, Reed's leg never regained strength. He was forced to use a wheelchair permanently.

But he was determined to get back on the water. He joined Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana's sports program for disabled athletes.



MATT DETRICH / THE STAR

**Training for the World Disabled Water Ski Championships, Dan Reed prepares to practice at Morse Reservoir in Cicero. When he's not competing or working out, Reed teaches disabled water skiing during the summer.**

A year later, he was on an adaptive water ski at Morse Reservoir in Cicero — and on his way toward becoming something he says never would have happened if not for that broken leg.

"I'm an elite water skier," Reed said. "And I don't think I would've been that in my able-bodied days."

His coach, Kniesly, said Reed has advanced to the point where he can no longer coach him as a disabled skier.

"I really am coaching him now as I would an able-bodied skier. I think disabled athletes are just as intense as any elite able-bodied athletes could ever be," Kniesly said. "What differentiates the disabled skier from the able-bodied athlete is the extra hoops they have to jump

through in order to just get to the competition's venue. Once they're on the water, everybody's the same."

When he's not competing or working out, Reed teaches disabled water skiing during the summer.

"I'm astounded," said his girlfriend of four years, Marty Stewart. "I'm able-bodied, and I can't keep up with him."

Sometimes the Rehabilitation Hospital of Indiana asks Reed to share his stories with people who have been injured.

"Life's not over. It's changed, but there's so many things you can still do," he tells them. "You got to try. . . . Get up, get out, experience life. It's there. You're not dead."

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