

The Bright Side of the World of Sports

Social Responsibility, Development, Entrepreneurship, and Great Performances

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No stopping them – Dreams and Kids

I received some great materials from **Tom Tuohy, Founder and President of Dreams for Kids**. It is a wonderful organization started in 1989. I strongly encourage you to visit their site to learn about their various programs, both in the U.S. and abroad. <http://dreamsforkids.org/>

One of the programs, Extreme Recess, “gives children with physical and developmental challenges the opportunity to participate in sports, often for the very first time. Adaptive sporting events from snow and water-skiing to biking and softball allow youth to realize a physical potential previously unimagined while having the time of their life!”

Please see the video here to get a glimpse of the impact such a program has on everyone involved and then read the story about a remarkable young man, who was born in Russia without legs and abandoned in an orphanage at birth. A Chicago family adopted him at 5 and two years ago at the age of 10 became a black belt. Yes, a black belt.

In a separate posting, we will highlight the organization’s partnership with the NHL’s Chicago Blackhawks that will enable them to take their program to each of the cities the NHL has a team. Finding ways to expand such efforts is key and we wish them the best of luck.

Chicago Sun Times, Sept. 17, 2007

by Stefano Esposito

The Karate Kid; Born without legs 10-year old earns his black belt

Julie McCarthy first saw it when she looked into the little boy's pale blue eyes at a Russian orphanage in the spring of 2001.

Six years later, McCarthy struggles to find the words that capture just what she means. "A bright spark," "a fire" come close, she says.

And McCarthy saw the fire again, when she and her husband, Dave, brought Michael — then 4 — to his new home in Chicago after adopting him. Without help, Michael — palms down — heaved himself up two flights of stairs into his bedroom and then clambered up to the top bunk.

"He's got a fire burning in him," McCarthy said last week. "It encompasses every aspect of his life."

In August, 10-year-old Michael — born without legs — earned a black belt in karate at his Glenview martial arts school; Michael did it wearing prosthetic legs that attach above the knee.

"I was very nervous," Michael recalled last week, talking about the public performance of intricate movements required for the black belt. "You don't see people get black belts every day."

What makes Michael's story all the more remarkable is when he arrived at the karate school in September 2003, he had not yet learned to walk on his new metal legs.

And he might never have learned, his mom says, if Michael had listened to one doctor, who recommended putting him in a wheelchair. Instead, Michael's family found a Chicago prosthetist, who said the boy didn't need to be pushed around in a chair — he needed to learn to walk.

So four years ago, Michael showed up at the Glenview school. He'd watched his older brother, Tommy, play Little League baseball, and Michael desperately wanted to play sports. A neighbor suggested a Glenview karate instructor who worked with kids, including those with disabilities.

But Jeff Kohn had never taken on a child without legs.

At first, Kohn worked with Michael one-on-one for one hour a week.

"I'd have Michael on my lap, and he'd mirror me with punches and blocks," Kohn said.

The beefy, sentimental instructor recalled: "It was the most enjoyable hour of the week."

As Michael progressed, Kohn rigged up all kinds of devices to help the boy learn to walk, including parallel ropes raised three feet off the ground.

It took Michael one year to learn to walk, and another two before he could punch without falling over backward.

FINISHED THIRD IN COMPETITION

Then, Michael started participating in tournaments across the country, competing against other disabled kids. He isn't able to kick or spar with other students. But he competes in the "kata" competitions, performing a series of precise karate movements across the floor in an "H" pattern.

Michael got so good that late last year, he started competing with kids who weren't disabled. And in March of this year, he placed third out of 20 kids in a tournament in Columbus, Ohio.

From time to time, kids ask Michael about his legs, made from a combination of titanium and aluminum. He's not one to feel self-pity, his mother says, but he doesn't like to talk about his disability.

One day earlier this month, Michael was working out at the karate school. He was easy to spot, his metallic red legs poking out from the bottom of his white karate pants. He was the only kid who wasn't barefoot.

When he walked, he shifted stiffly from side to side. His hands seemed the size of a man's. After years of using his hands and arms to get around — using crutches and when not wearing his legs — "he's massively strong in his upper body," his mother said.

But he was treated like everyone else in class, scolded when his punches weren't as sharp as they should be. When the students were asked to race back and forth across the mats, Michael catapulted forward on crutches. Later, he showed off his punching skills, breaking a 3/4-inch board in two with the palm of his hand.

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One Response to "No stopping them – Dreams and Kids"



[tomtuohy](#) Says:

[September 26, 2009 at 8:03 pm](#)

Thanks for the post Sab!

<http://www.dreamsforkids.org>

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