

In Memoriam: Men Beyond Measure

JIM HAYES

Coach Jim Hayes, 58, passed away unexpectedly Saturday, May 24, 2008. Many veterans know him as the master of the slalom (wheelchair obstacle course) at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. For more than a decade, Coach Hayes was the mastermind behind slalom, which often intimidated novice athletes and allowed those most experienced to highlight their talents. Everyone from participants, coaches, and rehabilitation clinicians to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) executives learned about the wheelchair skills that could be achieved with proper training and determination. Coach Hayes was well known for his response when asked how he came-up with the ideas for the Super Giant Slalom or “Super-G”: when he had a nightmare, he would wake up and write it down for next year’s event. Coach Hayes demonstrated how to complete the courses that he had prepared, and he was quick with an encouraging word or tip for old hands and newcomers alike.

Coach Hayes was a leader not only at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games but also in the broader arena of the disability community. He injured his spinal cord in a diving accident at age 18; following that, he became the first student with a spinal cord injury (SCI) to live on campus at University of Texas at Arlington (UTA) and served as president of the Handicapped Student Association. He challenged UTA’s top officials to live as he did, in a wheelchair, and their experience led to more accommodations for students with disabilities, years before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) arrived in 1990. Later, he would serve as the ADA Coordinator for UTA.

After graduation, he worked for UTA, creating the Office for Students with Disabilities and forming wheelchair basketball and tennis teams. In 2000, he became the full-time coach for the Movin’ Mavs, who won seven national championships in the National Wheelchair Basketball Association. Coach Hayes was an accomplished basketball player and wheelchair road-racer, earning a gold medal in racing in the 1984 Paralympic Games. Coach Hayes would tell people that his greatest accomplishments were the thousands of people with disabilities with whom he’s shared his life lessons with and, in turn, helped them become the men and women they are today.

CLIFFORD D. CRASE

Clifford D. Crase was born on September 24, 1938, in Trimountain, Michigan, and died of pancreatic cancer on August 15, 2007. Phoenix, Arizona, was home to Cliff Crase and his loving wife, Nancy, and their daughter, Victoria Anne. Crase was among the giants of people with disabilities in the world—none has accomplished more or done more for people with disabilities and veterans than he. Crase graduated as valedictorian from Clark High School, Michigan, in 1956. He enlisted in the U.S. Air Force and was stationed in the Persian Gulf and Mediterranean areas from 1956 to 1959. At the age of 20, an auto accident left him with an SCI, resulting in tetraplegia, and he became a life member of the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA). Crase would go on to graduate from the University of Illinois and begin a lifetime of competition as a wheelchair athlete, stockbroker, writer, publisher, and advocate for people with disabilities and veterans.

Although he competed in several sports, Crase was primarily known for his prowess in swimming and track and field, where he again served the United States, wearing the uniform of Team USA and earning 32 international medals, including 10 gold, and being named the “Outstanding Athlete” at the 1967 Pan-Am Games. Among his many sporting honors, he was captain of the U.S. Wheelchair Team in 1969, recipient of PVA’s Jack Gerhardt Athlete of the Year Award, recipient of National Wheelchair Athlete of the Year, and inductee into the National Wheelchair Athletic Association (NWAA) Hall of Fame, National Wheelchair Basketball Association Hall of Fame, and the Athletes with Disabilities Hall of Fame. Cliff was a member of the NWAA/Wheelchair Sports USA Board of Directors, 1979–1991.

Most people probably know Crase better for a project that he started with his wonderful wife, Nancy, back in 1969. He started writing a column on sports for *Paraplegia News*, the magazine of PVA. This column led the Crases to start *Sports ‘n Spokes* in 1975 and make it the premier magazine on sports for people with disabilities, with more than 9,000 subscribers. Crase’s treatment of athletes with disabilities, charming style, and advocacy placed him at the focal point of the disability rights movement, giving voice to people with disabilities who wanted

to lead active lifestyles and show the world that, while they had disabilities, they were still capable of accomplishing great things. In 1981, PVA purchased *Sports 'n Spokes* but kept Crase on as the managing editor. For most of the past 30 years, Crase was also the editor of *PN Magazine* (*Paraplegia News*). Both magazines provided extensive coverage of the National Veterans Wheelchair Games and the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. Crase loved his PVA family and always did all he could to help PVA members and veterans.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

I am a better person for having known both of these men and for having benefitted from the world that they helped to shape for people with disabilities and veterans. Having been a participant in the slalom competitions organized at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, I witnessed first-hand how it changed veterans young and old. The games made me a firm believer that they alter people's lives, restoring their inner strength and instilling a

feeling of success—all in an environment in which the Armed Forces' core values of honor, integrity, accomplishment, team work, and never leaving a fallen comrade are reaffirmed. For years, the Crase's have given me the privilege to write articles for *Sports 'n Spokes* and *PN Magazine*. I still read each issue from cover to cover, anxious to learn and to see whether I recognize any friends on those precious pages. When I was first injured, these two magazines restored my hope that there could be a full and productive life after SCI, because the proof was right there on the pages. PVA still gives away copies for newly injured veterans, and I am always pleased to see a dog-eared copy on the bedside of a veteran at one of our military treatment facilities or VA medical centers.

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