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Athletes With Disabilities Take Center Stage at Extremity Games 6

Athletes from across the United States participated in the Extremity Games 6 Main Event clinics and competitions.

Four athletes hid behind their sunglasses before the wakeboarding elite competition at Lake Dunlap in New Braunfels, Texas. It was just before 8 a.m., and the coffee had yet to kick in for the lounging competitors. The boat slowly swayed from side to side as a photographer, driver, judge and a physical therapist hopped aboard to join them in the back of the boat. With all passengers on board, the engine grunted and the boat was launched. As it built up speed, the athletes' conversations turned from how tired they were to comparisons between the best places to board, their most memorable tricks and their biggest fails.

Wakeboarder Billy Tonis, in desperate need for music, served as house DJ and gradually turned up the volume on his iPod as the boat reached the competition area. World-renowned adaptive wakeboarder and [transtibial amputee](#) Sean Reyngoudt stood up, tied his rope, strapped his right foot and left prosthesis into his board and jumped back first into the water. They were all up now. It was time to ride.

Wakeboarding competition

Athletes Mike Schultz and Mike Krohn competed alongside Reyngoudt and Tonis, last year's wakeboarding champion, at the wakeboarding elite competition held on Saturday, June 25. Wakeboarding was the first competition of the day, which included events in mountain biking, skateboarding, kayaking and rock climbing at Texas Ski Ranch in New Braunfels, Texas.

After a warm-up run, each athlete was allotted 10 minutes to perform and show off their tricks as the judge on the boat scored them. Reyngoudt, who also excels in professional kiteboarding, was a natural in the water and scored some high marks with his ability to spin, flip and twist his body in the air while switching the handlebar from his right hand to his left behind his back.

“This guy is a beast,” Krohn said. “He’s making this look effortless.”

Born in Switzerland but raised in the Florida Keys, Reyngoudt was technically sound and landed most of the jumps in his 10-minute heat. The next competitor was Tonis, an [Extremity Games](#) veteran and former champion from Northern California about 30 minutes from the Delta, where he regularly boards. A motorcycle accident left Tonis with a severe brachial plexus injury causing paralysis in his right arm. He has no feeling from the elbow down, so he holds the handlebar with his left hand and tucks his right arm into his shirt to avoid additional injury if he crashes. Tonis was the highest flyer of the day, slowly drifting his board to the far right of the boat before making a sharp high-speed cut toward the boat's wake. In the air, he bent his legs and brought the board close to his chest while twisting his body and holding onto the handlebar with one hand, ultimately making a smooth landing.

“He goes so big,” Schultz said.

Schultz from Pilager, Minn., is an avid motocross and snowcross racer but entered the wakeboarding elite competition and performed admirably. Though impressed with his run, passengers and competitors on the boat were more amazed with Schultz’s lower extremity prosthesis, which he built himself, without any formal engineering training, in his home garage.

“I just needed something more durable,” Schultz said. “It’s working pretty well today.”

Krohn finished the wakeboarding competition with a great run of his own. Krohn lost his left arm from the elbow down after a jet ski accident. Like Tonis, Krohn held the handlebar with his right hand and got some big air in the day’s final run — nearly landing the Scarecrow, a toe-side front flip to a switch, landing heel side.

Reyngoudt took home first place, Tonis finished second, and Schultz finished third.

Mountain biking and skateboarding

Andy May won the mountain biking below-knee competition. May, a competitive mountain biker and cyclocross racer, has been a transtibial amputee since 2000, when a driver ran a red light and crashed into his motorcycle. Greg Lakowski came in second, with Chad Crittenden coming in third place. In the above-knee mountain biking competition, Stephen Buchler took first prize. Carlos Garcia finished second, and Pete O’Brien came in third.

In the skateboarding competition, Stephen Shope, last year’s first-prize winner, took home the gold in the Shoe City Skate Jam. Shope, a bilateral upper extremity amputee, showcased his tricks on the half-pipe and rails as Extremity Games athletes and volunteers cheered him on.

Kayaking

The kayaking competition featured the men’s elite and novice competitions, as well as a women’s event. In the kayaking men’s elite competition, Schultz, who was a third-place winner earlier in the day in the wakeboarding elite competition, summoned the strength to take first place, just ahead of second-place finisher Mike Schulenberg. In the kayaking men’s novice competition, Jeff Waldmuller won the event, edging out second-place finisher, Brandon Holiday, and third-place finisher, Alex Miller.

In the women’s competition, last year’s first-place winner Kelly Allen successfully defended her title by beating out second-place finisher Brooke Artesi and third-place finisher Patty Long. Allen confessed her love for all of the Extremity Games’ athletes but joked that when the competition begins, “it is all about the hardware.”

Rock climbing

Under the supervision of rock climber Craig DeMartino, Extremity Games athletes did their best to conquer the indoor mountain climbing wall. A right-leg transtibial amputee after a 96-foot fall

in a rock climbing accident, DeMartino guided and encouraged the athletes as they skillfully scaled the wall. Each competitor was timed climbing the left side, right side and center of the wall. The competitor with the fastest combined time would win the event. Waldmuller won the rock climbing elite competition — his second gold of the competition. In second place was Miller, who dazzled the audience with his ability to ascend the rock climbing wall with one leg, as he jumped from peg to peg. Kimberly Olson took home third place after successfully reaching the top of the wall in all three races.

In the rock climbing novice competition, Horst Behner improved from last year's third-place finish to win the novice event. Brooke Artesi came in second, and Greg Dotson finished third.

Clinics

On Friday, June 24, the day before the competition, amputees interested in participating in sports attended clinics and exhibitions, during which they demonstrated their perseverance, desire and passion for their respective sports in front of a large number of spectators.

Upper extremity amputee Lucio Guerra showed off his brute strength and power lifting ability by demonstrating how he bench pressed with essentially one hand. Guerra would grip the bar with his left hand and balance the bar on his right residual limb, repeatedly lifting more than 100 lb in front of an amazed crowd.

Nearby, Holiday displayed his mixed martial arts moves while teaching the proper way to take down an opponent on the mat. On the ground for most of the demonstration, Holiday showed his audience how an amputee can attack and manipulate the opponent using a combination of strength and agility. Other clinics included wakeboarding, rock climbing, kayaking, mountain biking and skateboarding. — *Anthony Calabro*