Klipsun Magazine 2004, Volume 35, Issue 01 - September

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Editor's Note

Traditional athletic stereotypes need not apply.
In today's society, typical representations of athletes look more like NFL players than everyday people. For the second issue of Klipsun, we decided to break open this stereotype and show the face of people whose participation in sports is anything but predictable.

It is tradition that the second issue of Klipsun is a themed one. Though sports are something a variety of newspapers and magazines cover, Klipsun had yet to fully explore them, until now. What we found was a handful of people whose desire to participate was fueled by a passion for their sport that had nothing to do with fame or fortune. Each story has an inspirational undertone and shows that being an athlete can strengthen both body and mind.

So enjoy this fall issue and remember that athleticism is relative.

We encourage you to let us know what you think of what you see in our magazine. If you have questions, comments or story ideas, please contact us at (360) 650-3737 or via e-mail at Klipsunwwu@hotmail.com. Thanks for reading.

Best wishes,

Katie Grimes

Staff Writers
The nostril-burning, smoke-filled tavern where Dennis Miller plays pool accommodates approximately 20 regular customers, dangling cigarettes from their bottom lips and sipping on beers at 3 p.m. The neon beer signs are blindingly bright, although darkness fills the room early in the day. Miller emerges with his black leather cue bag slung over his shoulder by a Harley Davidson strap with glowing orange lettering. As he walks, the orange nine-ball key chain that dangles off of his bag clinks against him in a monotonous way. As he bends over the pool table, his left leg stands perfectly straight, and his right leg is slightly bent. He eloquently places his hands around his one-of-a-kind cue stick, and takes a smooth shot, sinking the ball into the left corner pocket. After successfully dropping every ball, Miller shakes his hips and raises his Miller Genuine Draft in a victory dance.

"I decided that lying there is not what I wanted to do." From that point on, he began using pool to aid his recovery process.

Before jumping back into the sport of pool, Miller had some serious muscle problems to conquer, so he began visiting Bellingham Physical Therapy twice a week, and he gives a vast amount of credit to his therapists. "Yeah I give them a lot of credit, a couple of them ... Jan Burbank has gone to school to learn special techniques to use in my situation and for other people," he says. "Like learning shortening and lengthening of the muscles, things like that. They have really gone out of their way to learn things to try to help people out - it's not just a job to them."

Through physical therapy, Miller was able to train his muscles to bend over a pool table. He did this with the help of physical therapist John McWilliams, among others. "Pool wasn't a specific therapy — I mean it was for all things, for me to be able to stand up, for me to be able to regain my walking capabilities — but we worked specifically on my lower back (in physical therapy)," he says. "John McWilliams would run his elbow down it. It felt like a knife slicing me up every time he did it, but we had to do that in order for me to bend over to be able to play pool."

Burbank, a physical therapy assistant at Bellingham Physical Therapy, has worked with Miller on his recovery for the past 12 years and says that his improvement is remarkable. "Typically, people in his situation would be either paralyzed or not alive — it is nothing short of a miracle," she says. Burbank, a petite, soft-spoken woman, says Miller did not tell her about his pool playing until approximately seven years ago. "Pool is what's getting him out of the house — it is providing socialization, and I knew that, but I didn't even know that Miller is the top player in Whatcom County," she says. "He's so humble."

She says that Miller's using pool as therapy is more of a psychological aspect of recovery, rather than a physical one.
After intense surgery to remove a tumor, Dennis Miller was left without the use of his limbs. Michelle Reindal exposes the unexpected form of therapy that 'cued' him into how to overcome his condition. Photo by Keith Bolling.

“Dennis has such mental control over his body during that time when he is competing, and he is so focused on the pool,” she said. “The guy has incredible grit and tenacity — he really pushes himself. He’s a unique individual, and I really can’t imagine anyone else doing what he’s doing.”

Cheryl Batty, also a physical therapist at Bellingham Physical Therapy, says that the mental form of healing cannot be separated from the physical form.

“You can’t treat just the injury, you have to treat the whole person,” she says. “Some people will come out of things that are really traumatic, and you do deal with some form of post-traumatic stress syndrome at the same time that you are trying to rehab the physical part of what happened to them, so realistically, you are always working the mental. It’s hugely tied together — the psyche and the physical.”

Batty says that when she has a patient with a life-altering or traumatic event, she explores different avenues or activities to help with calming the psychological disparity.

“In Dennis’ case where not only is that a traumatic thing, it’s a life-changing type of event, so how to get back to the things you’ve enjoyed doing — maybe you can’t,” she says. “We spend a lot of time trying to get rid of that mental angst.”

Sara Cuene, a mental-health doctor at Western Washington University’s student health center, says she agrees with Batty on the importance of mental recovery.

“With serious injuries, the biggest thing we see is depression,” she says. “The injury changes what they can do in life, and they need to go through a process of grieving and mourning. It is hard to isolate the mental and physical because we are made up of all of it.”

Miller says that playing pool has given him a psychological reawakening and that having that mental drive makes all the difference — although the physical pain still is unbearable.

“I’ve used a term before for what the pain is like,” he says. “Basically if you cut your feet off, pack on 3-400 pounds of bricks, poke your eyes out, break an arm, and wake up one morning and decide you’re gonna walk to Mount Baker. I know it sounds funny, but that’s what I was going through physically. Nothing worked. Nothing moved. Everything was incredible pain — there was no reason for anything that I did. I had to find a reason — I had to find a purpose, and that is where pool came in.”

Although a humble man, Miller says he recognizes the great triumphs he has made.

“To get from sitting on the couch screaming, not being able to do anything, to going out that first day was amazing,” he says. “To give up, not try or to eat a bullet is easy, I mean, honestly, I understand that whole philosophy of committing suicide, ‘cause I was in the middle of it. I had to decide every day. So for that reason, pool gave me a reason to live.”

Although mentally Miller had made a decision to play pool, the physical part was not a decision, it was a process — and still is.

“I had to learn my coordination because my left leg was totally dead, and I leaned to the left probably two to three inches off kilter, so I had to learn to shoot sideways,” he says. “I had to teach myself all over again, and that’s where I just kept at it — we went to Chichetti’s at lunch every day while I was going to college — to play pool.”

When Miller rejoined the inside circle of pool, he realized that all of the pool halls and billiard rooms had been shut down — so he decided to open his own, Bellingham Billiards.

His business is run out of his home and has been successful for the four years since it opened. He says that his pool shop has denied death and created happiness in his life, on and off the pool table.

“I’ve always been strong-willed, I’ve always been sunny, I’ve always looked at all that stuff I can look at any situation and make the best of it to deduce how to get through it or understand it. What pool really does give you a sense of understanding — I knew it was going well, and that is one of the things, when I went into my shop for those years, that I figured out. You have to find a reason you’re alive. Death is too easy.”
Brenda Terpstra sits alone between games of a double-header shining her black shoes. Beads of sweat line her brow, her blue-and-gray uniform is stretched taut over her chest guard and her black face mask lies at her side. She wipes away a few disheveled stands of straight brown hair from her eyes as she glances up to see the Western fast-pitch softball players scattered throughout the crowd. The players on the team are collecting their congratulations from their families and friends on their latest win.

The umpire gains little recognition for the outcome and often goes unrecognized until a questionable call. If one is made, the fans shout from the stands, and coaches leap from their dugouts to defend their teams.

As Terpstra crouches behind the
catcher, her eyes peer out of her bulky face mask, staring intently at the incoming pitch. From this angle, she has a full, unobstructed view of the softball field. In Division II or III college softball game, two umpires are present, one behind the plate and the other in the field. Division I college softball has three umpires on the field.

"Being a part of a game as the plate umpire, I have the best seat in the house," Terpstra says with a smile.

Terpstra, however, has to pay a price for having the best seat in the house. Occasionally, Terpstra encounters a disgruntled
Western Washington University junior Blake McCalia puts on shin protectors before a Babe Ruth League game. The Babe Ruth League consists of 13- to 14-year-old boys.

Coach or fan while umpiring, but she says that remaining calm is her only option.

“The hotter the coach gets, the calmer I get,” Terpstra says. “If the coach is yelling at me about a call, I ask them what they saw when the play occurred.”

Terpstra attributes most in-game disagreements to the line of sight a coach has from the dugout or the coach’s boxes, which are located beside first and third base. When a confrontation does occur, the first step is to treat the coach with respect, Terpstra says.

As a former coach, Terpstra says she knows the value of listening when coaches have a question or a complaint.

“All I wanted when I was coaching basketball was for the referee to tell me why they made a call and then to have them listen to my point of view,” Terpstra says. “I know the passion they have for the game because they are fighting for their players.”

Terpstra says she encounters few problems with coaches because of the preventive measures she takes. Developing a good rapport with the coaches by listening can prevent an altercation during the game, she says.

“When they do come out to ask me a question, I tell them, ‘Here is what I saw from my angle,’ ” Terpstra says. “I show the coach that I have respect for them by listening, and this seems to help de-escalate the situation. We are just as human as the coaches are, and as umpires, we work on being professional.”

If a situation does escalate, a coach could get ejected from a game, Terpstra says. Umpires then risk missing the next crucial call because they are thinking about the previous altercation.

“There have been a few times when I have blown a call and I know it,” Terpstra says. “As long as they do not call me names or curse at me, I don’t have a problem. If I mess up I tell the coach, ‘I blew the call. I will catch it next time.’ I think they respect that, rather than making excuses for a bad call.”

Terpstra says she comes across some coaches who, despite her efforts, continue to complain throughout the entire game.

“There have been times where coaches are constantly chipping away at me and their players,” Terpstra says.

Players make mistakes because they focus too much on their coaches and the previous calls from the umpires, she says.

With more than five years of umpiring experience, Terpstra says she rarely recalls dealing with unruly fans or players, but she does not put it past them.

“Fans are getting to be more vocal and aggressive in athletics today,” Terpstra says. “However, there are just a few fans that are giving them all a bad name. Fans do heckle me sometimes from the stands about a call I made, mostly about a questionable strike or a out I made, but I just block it out and focus on my job.”

Although Terpstra has not experienced a serious encounter with a coach, player or fan, reported cases of umpire altercations occur throughout the United States.

According to ESPN.com, a 35-year-old softball player, Charles J. Mitchell, attacked Lester Barr, a 75-year-old educational softball umpire, during a game March 20, 2002. Mitchell became agitated after Barr made a call and attacked him after being ejected from the game, Florida’s Coconut Creek police said at the time.

Mitchell spit in Barr’s face, put him in a chokehold and wrestled him to the ground. Players and fans had to pry him off the unconscious umpire. Barr received treatment for a cracked kneecap and a shoulder injury, and he had to give up umpiring.

At Terpstra’s level, she says parents and players have a vested interest in the game, which can fuel the fire of competitiveness.

“Families put a lot of money into traveling so they can give their child this opportunity,” Terpstra says. “This is seen even more during high school when recruiting and scholarship money is at stake.”

Terpstra, who also is the Mount Baker High School athletic director and physical education teacher, started her umpire training five years ago. She attended class two times a week for one hour each night, learning the basic rules about slow-pitch softball. Shortly after her first slow-pitch season, Terpstra was asked to umpire junior high and high school...
fast-pitch games and then college softball. “I love umpiring because I am not out there for the glory,” Terpstra says. “I had my time for that when I played sports. I was a player and a coach. Then I wanted to see the third side of sports, which was officiating. I see it as a challenge and a way to be an athlete again.”

After umpiring recreational slow pitch and then fast pitch at a high school level, Terpstra says she developed a love for the speed of college games. “I liked being an umpire for slow pitch, but it is a slower pace game,” Terpstra says. “With fast pitch, the game moves much quicker. From the first game, I was hooked.”

In contrast, umpiring at a lower skill level means different training and experiences.

Western Washington University juniors Blake McCalla and Brent Burne have umpired baseball games for Bellingham’s Babe Ruth League for two years to earn some extra money while attending college. The league consists of 13- to 14-year-old boys who can participate in a recreational league or a competitive league. Noticeable differences exist between recreational leagues and the competitive leagues such as the coach and fan attitudes, Blake says.

“During the recreational games, the players are out there for fun, and we tend to be a lot more relaxed,” Blake says. “But in the competitive league, coaches and fans tend to be harder on us because they demand more from the game.”

Mike Love, Bellingham Park & Recreation athletic coordinator, trains umpires for the Babe Ruth League by giving them a walk-through of basic field positions, explaining the rules and demonstrating the strike zone. No formal training exists for dealing with altercations.

“We do have situations that come across our desk, and we take them all very seriously,” Love says. “We encourage the coaches to be good role models for the kids. Overall, the experience should be as positive as possible. When there is a problem, our advisory board will review the complaint. We absolutely do not tolerate any kind of physical altercations.”

After an incident, Love discusses with the umpire what he or she could have done differently in the volatile situation. If the umpire remains calm, the coach has the choice of whether or not to escalate the situation further.

“Some people say ‘Kick the coach out,’” Love says. “But what does that accomplish? It just creates more animosity between coaches, players and fans. But I am not saying we won’t kick a coach out if it is needed.”

After one competitive game, Burne recalls engaging in a verbal exchange with a parent from the losing team. “The parent followed me to my car still arguing about a call,” Burne says. “I just remained calm, so it did not go any further than that, but he did call and complain to Bellingham Parks & Recreation. For the most part, I have not had any serious problems.”

The most common complaints come from parents in the stands, Blake says.

“It’s ridiculous sometimes when parents are sitting up on a hill too far away to make an accurate call on a play,” Blake says. “You can hear them yell, ‘Are you helping out your little brother out there?’ Overall, it hasn’t been that bad because most of them know we are college students and this is not the major leagues.”

Some umpires want to have control over a game rather than gain respect, and that is when a game can get out of hand, Love says.

“An umpire can have a fancy uniform and shiny shoes and still not be a good umpire,” Love said. “Respect is something that is earned. As long as the fans and coaches see that the umpire is hustling and being consistent, there generally will not be a problem.”

Umpires are meant to remain in the background, Love says. They gain their respect by showing the players, coaches and fans they are out there to call a fair game.
Should cheerleading be considered a sport or an entertainment forum? Sarah Getchman examines the athleticism and dedication of local cheerleading teams. Photos by Sarah Getchman.

As a short, muscular young man attempts a flip, he seems to forget what he is doing midair and crashes face first into the floor with a resounding smack. He grits his teeth and moans as he tries not to cry out in pain. Another short young man with shaggy hair, in shorts and a long-sleeved T-shirt grunts as he lifts his tiny partner into the air. She slips from his hands, and they both sit down hard on the floor as a typical Saturday Western Washington University cheerleading practice begins.

For cheerleaders to perform their required activities, they must be as strong as football players, as poised as dancers and as flexible as gymnasts. As cheerleading gains popularity, the controversy rages about whether it should be considered a sport. Most cheerleaders agree that the amount of teamwork and the physical triumphs of cheerleading qualify them as athletes.

"Someone can individually be classified as an athlete but not necessarily be part of a sport," says Hillary Simon, a Sehome High School junior and member of Northwest Silverstars competitive cheerleading team. "I think all cheerleaders are athletes. It's very demanding no matter what level you're at." Even dressed in street clothes, Simon is a model cheerleader. The tiny girl's peppy attitude is punctuated by her tightly fitted, bright red T-shirt. A white bandana that matches her sandals holds back her curly brown hair. Large diamond studs glitter in her earlobes like a mirror of her eyes, which sparkle with excitement out of lids fringed with dark lashes. For Simon, cheerleading is life.

"There are a lot of different sports out there," she says. "I think a sport kind of defines a person's personality in a way — it can show who you are. I just found that cheerleading really covers everything that I feel should be in a sport. We work together, and we're always there for each other, like sisters. I like to be close with people and create friendships that can last a lifetime. Competitive cheer helps you find people that can be there for you in the long run."

Simon joined the Northwest Silverstars a year and a half ago. The team accepts girls from Whatcom County who want to be part of a competitive cheerleading team. Practice is intense. The squad practices two or three days a week for three hours at a time. One day is dedicated to tumbling, and the other two focus on dance, cheer and jump practice. The all-girl squad does not cheer for any specific athletic team but prepares for competitions, usually in Seattle. Simon says the competitive team allows girls to move beyond the routine high school cheerleading and pushes them harder athletically.

"You have to have a passion to cheer (on this team) because it's all about cheerleading," Simon says. "We go to competitions, and we cheer for the Northwest Silverstars — we are the team.... Not only do I feel like it's part of my family and I can bond with the girls, but I also get to go out there and do what I love. It's just such a different sport than anything else. It really shows that you can become a better, stronger person through the trials you have to get through to be the best."

Washington was one of the last states to accept competitive cheerleading, says George McGuire, a Western junior and Pacific Storms All-Star Cheerleading Company coach. He says many
other squads throughout the country compete on a regular basis, often as much as many gymnastics teams.

"Cheerleading in general is definitely a sport, considering where it's been and where it's going," McGuire says. "But there are teams out there that aren't ready to make it a sport for them yet. ... It really bothers me when people don't take it to the level that it should be."

McGuire started cheering during his junior year at Steilacoom High School, where he was named one of the top male cheerleaders in Washington. His squad was ranked 27th in the nation. McGuire then moved on to become a member of the Seattle Sonics Stunt Squad, a student coach for Western's cheerleading team this past season and a certified instructor with the Universal Cheerleading Association.

"My entire life is cheer now," McGuire says with a laugh. "I work out so hard — if I'm not in the weight room, I'm throwing girls in the air."

McGuire says his high school cheerleading team went to at least three competitions a year. It worked out on a daily basis, participating in heavy weight training and conditioning.

"We worked out harder than the basketball and the football teams," McGuire says. "I don't think there was anybody who left (practice) without breaking a sweat."

McGuire says that even though Western athletic department officials consider cheerleading a varsity sport, many other people do not. He says that many times the team did not even have a place to practice on Western's campus. The cheerleading squad was forced to share a gym with the track team, which often kicked the cheerleaders out, forcing them to relocate or adjust practice times, he says.

Catherine Cutlip, a Western junior and '03-'04 Western student cheerleading coach, said competitive cheerleading is different than other types of cheerleading. She says even squads that do not cheer competitively can be classified as sports teams if the members are able to tumble and do stunts. Although all the members of Western's team can tumble, Cutlip says the activity still does not receive treatment as a sport and thinks the reason is clear.

"Honestly, it's more meant to entertain the crowd," she says. "We're supporting another sport, in all reality. The most important part is to get support for your team, not to show off our (cheerleading) abilities. Western has no school spirit, so increasing that is a really good thing."

Simon says many local high school cheer squads have the potential to be great, but they just do not push themselves hard enough. She says a sport can be something in which you compete against yourself.

"You cheer because you love it, not because you're rooting on someone else," Simon says. "It's beneficial to yourself as a person ... competitive cheer is so much more rewarding for a single individual ... it teaches you commitment and you really find yourself."

The vast majority of people consider cheerleaders athletes, so even if cheerleading never receives universally recognition as a sport, cheerleaders and their comrades can rest easy knowing they finally have gained some respect.

"Every girl sometimes feels like they don't get the recognition they deserve," Simon says. "But there are levels. It's all about how you look at it. It's about the person striving to be the best. My first season has changed me so much ... once you find a sport and connect with it, it makes you be who you really want to be. Sometimes you don't come in first, and people don't think you're the best, but as long as you did your best, that's all that matters."
Anna Matuszewski spent the majority of her childhood training to become a professional ice skater. Lianna Wingfield tells the story of how Matuszewski developed a passion for skating, and how after a tragic knee injury, she has used performing and teaching dance as therapy for her injury. Photos by Lianna Wingfield.
Anna Matuszewski stands at the front of the studio, facing the mirrored wall. Black circular railings line the room, and pale oak covers the floor. The surface is shiny and slick, with a few scuffs from the soles of tennis shoes. As she moves her body to the beat of the music, the class of dancers imitates her sharp, choreographed moves.

It is 12:45 p.m. on a Saturday, and Matuszewski is teaching her weekly hip-hop dance class. She is dressed in a black ribbed tank top, loose-fitting denim pants that ride low on her waist, and her hair is pulled back into a low ponytail, leaving a few strands of dark brown curls to line her cheekbones. The 14 students in her class this week attempt to follow her popping and shaking techniques. Some are able to mirror the moves Matuszewski performs, while others struggle to feel the beat of the music.

With 15 minutes of class remaining, she pauses for a minute and restarts the music.

"Once more," she bellows.

The class begins the routine from the beginning, with Usher's song "Yeah" resonating throughout the humid room.

Matuszewski is not a veteran of this dance style. She began dancing on ice more than 21 years ago, and trained as a professional figure skater for 15 years. A devastating knee injury at the age of 18 cut her athletic career as a skater short, but, still wanting to pursue a passion for body movement, she began to dance off the ice.

Getting started

At the age of 5, Matuszewski lived with her family in the mountains of the San Bernardino National Forest in the resort and vacation town of Lake Arrowhead, Calif. At the time, the town was so small it did not have a stoplight. It did however have one distinctive characteristic, The Ice Castle skating rink.

Growing up, Matuszewski and her three siblings were home schooled by their mother while their father built houses to support the family. Wanting to get the children out of the house, Denise Matuszewski, Anna's mother, signed them up for ice-skating lessons for a recreational activity.

Matuszewski says she immediately felt a natural talent and comfort when she would lace up her skates and go to the rink. What began as a recreational activity soon became Matuszewski's competitive sport.

"I always loved skating from the moment I started over 21 years ago," Matuszewski says. "There was something about the movement, the grace, and the athletic and mental aspects of the sport that attracted me. I always skated. It was just what I did."

The family supported Matuszewski's talent and dedication emotionally, financially and mentally, Denise says. They made frequent moves so she could pursue ice skating. By the age of 15, Matuszewski had lived in Delaware, New York and California. She says she always believed that it was because of her father's work that the family moved so much.

"My parents ended up traveling across the country three times so that I could skate with the best," Matuszewski says, smiling. "And I did, and it was great. My parents never told me that I was one of the main reasons why we kept moving. I had to do home schooling because my sport was so demanding and took up so much time."

Denise says that as a parent, she always had to think about the entire family, but every decision was also made with her daughter's dedication to skating in mind.

"Skating is one of the top three most important things in my life," Matuszewski says.
life, "Matuszewski says. "It is what I always wanted to be and suc­
cceeded in, and everyone around me felt that same goal. It decided
many factors in my life, and it always came first."

**Elite training**

Ten years after she began skating, Matuszewski returned to
Lake Arrowhead, but this time her family did not accompany her.
After submitting a video, recommendations and an application,
Matuszewski received notification that she had earned a scholar­
ship to attend a training camp at The Ice Castle skating rink, which
became The Ice Castle International Training Center. Matuszewski
packed her belongings and moved out of her parents' house and
into the camp houses, to train with other elite athletes.

"It was one of my favorite chapters in my life," Matuszewski
says. "We all lived, ate and skated together."

Elite training, however, was not always fun. It was competitive and
intense. When her coach told her she was a little overweight to have
the ideal figure for the sport, Matuszewski became obsessive-compulsive
about her body. She began a workout plan, which resulted in her losing
25 pounds from her already healthy and fit 125-pound frame. Her intense
daily activities included skating four or five hours a day, one and a half
hours on a Stairmaster at level 10, which burns 1500 calories, plus an
additional one or two hours off-ice training such as weightlifting or practic­
ing her jumping off the ice.

"It was empowering to have control of my body," Matuszewski
says. "I liked the control. I was an athlete."

As a result of the intense weight loss, her cheeks became
sunken and her mood irritable. She would even count her calories
to ensure she did not exceed 800 a day.

"My hair used to be really curly," Matuszewski says, motioning
to her wavy locks. "But when I would run my fingers through it, it
would come out in chunks."

With the assistance of the staff at the training center, she was
able to find a balance within her life. Matuszewski says she realized
she had to stop obsessing about her weight, when she was
told that if she did not gain weight, she would lose her scholarship
and be sent home.

**Devastating ending**

During practice, two years later, Matuszewski's life changed
entirely. While choreographing a routine, she jumped into the air as
she had many times before. Upon landing, her skate dug into the
ice, causing her to lose control of her foot placement. Her body hit
the ice in a half lunge, and her kneecap protruded out to the side.
Matuszewski's body filled with pain as she limped away from the
rink.

Matuszewski complained a little about the pain in her knees
but did not recognize the severity of it. Her mother says that she
did not pay immediate attention to the knee injury, because the
nature of competitive sports is that they are hard on a person's body,
and sometimes that means dealing with pain.

The initial injury did not keep Matuszewski away from the rink,
and she continued to skate on her injury, until it was no longer
physically possible.

"I knew that I couldn't skate anymore when I couldn't bend my
knees," Matuszewski says, holding back tears. "I cried all the time.
I thought I was coming back to it (ice skating)."

For three years, Matuszewski underwent surgery and physical
therapy. She had the cartilage shaved from her kneecaps, and her
doctors told her that the injuries would heal with therapy. But noth­
ing could help her regain the strength that she needed to be able
to return to the ice as a skater.

"It was hard," Denise says. "Having to watch someone who
was very gifted, graceful and athletic give it up. The love within her
is for skating. If you love something and are good at it, there will
always be sadness if it comes to an end."

A visit to the doctor in March 2004 confirmed that Matuszewski
would not be able to be as physically active as she once was. The
doctor told her that she had level-four cartilage damage in her
knees, which is the highest possible damage a person can have.

Matuszewski says that, with her body, she is surprised she
has ever been able to do as much physical activity as she has. She
says that her feet are flat. Her kneecaps are two inches higher than
the average person's. These circumstances make it naturally more
difficult to be active.

"People with my kind of knees should have legs the size of my
arms," Matuszewski says, pointing at her small but toned arms
while explaining the weakness in her knees.

**Finding a new athletic outlet**

Knowing that she could not skate any more, Matuszewski took
on a new sport to fill the void — dancing. Three years ago, she
began taking a jazz workshop for one hour a day, twice a week.
“Dance is a nice second to skating,” she says. “I love movement. My body has been constantly moving since I was three. Dance and skating are my outlets of expression. They are part of my being, so ingrained in me.”

It is visible in the way she moves her body to the rhythm of the music that movement is a natural talent for her. Matuszewski’s body rarely skips a beat, and if she is in pain, she does not show it in the way she dances, despite recent warnings from her doctor, who says that if she keeps dancing, she might not be able to walk within the next five years.

“The reason I can dance and not skate is skating is very precise with the technique used in jumping,” Matuszewski says. “In skating, you have to be very consistent in your training in order to be top level. Dancing, on the other hand, is more style, and since I am teaching most of the stuff, I can use my handicap. In dance you can fudge it. You use your arms instead of your legs.”

Wanting to experiment with a different type of dance off the ice, Matuszewski signed up for a hip-hop class, and it quickly became her niche. For a long time, she was not aware that hip-hop dance was structured through routines and choreography. She says she assumed it was more free formed, recounting the days when she and Michelle Kwan would hibernate in their camp rooms at the training facilities in California and make up dance routines to songs such as “Baby Got Back” by Sir Mix-A-Lot.

“Hip-hop is hard on your body,” she says. “There is no limit to what you can do, and it is different from any other type of dance. There is no book that gives instructions on how to dance hip-hop. There are no names for the moves you do.”

At this point in her life, any athletic activity or sport is especially hard on her body.

**Student to career**

During the past two years, dancing has become not only a recreational hobby, but also Matuszewski’s sport and career. In 2001, she co-founded Breaking Point Dance Company in Edmonds with Wade Sugiyama. From when she wakes up in the morning until she goes to sleep at night, Matuszewski works on something related to dance. She teaches ice skating in the mornings, takes care of company business responsibilities in the middle of the day, teaches lyrical dance, hip-hop dance, ice skating and Pilates in the afternoons, rehearses in the evenings, performs four times a month with her company and finds time to take tap and jazz classes.

The dance company, which takes up a majority of her time, is unlike other hip-hop groups in the area, Matuszewski says. It incorporates in the founding elements of hip-hop, which include masters of ceremonies, rapping, disc jockeys, break dancing, and graffiti. She also pointed out that the group strives to be more street hip-hop and not pop.

“Hip-hop is not as sexual,” Matuszewski says. “It’s athletic. It can be sexy and sexual, but it doesn’t only consist of that.”

Hip-hop does consist of spinning, locking, and popping techniques, as well as acrobatics such as handstands and hand springs. By representing the more athletic nature of the dance, the company is able to have a more positive voice in the hip-hop culture. Sugiyama started break dancing seven years ago when he was 14. During high school, he played multiple sports, but found he was only mediocre at them. At home, he would watch Michael Jackson dance videos, rewinding them over and over until he learned the moves and took up dancing as his sport.

“Hip-hop is not all sex and drugs,” Sugiyama says. “It’s an athletic art form that keeps many off the streets.”

Matuszewski nods her head in agreement.

“We do breaking, locking and popping,” she says, raising her flexed arm in to a sharp, almost flexed position “In popping, you contort your body. Justin pops. Usher pops.”

Being able to rely on her arms to perform a majority of these moves has given Matuszewski the ability to continue dancing. Some days, she says, her knees hurt so bad that she can’t walk up the stairs, so she crawls. Matuszewski is not ready to give it up, and she may never have to entirely if she always is able to teach others what she has learned for the past 21 years of her life. Teaching, she says, will not fully satisfy her.

“I enjoy teaching,” Matuszewski says. “But I want to continue to learn, to perform and to move. Dancing is my sport now. You have to work to be your best, and it doesn’t always happen naturally. Dance and skating are my life. And they were always good to me and always there for me. I never knew anything without them.”
On Golden Wheels
Roller skating is no longer only a fun activity for Friday or Saturday nights but a recreational sport many senior citizens are falling in love with. Meagan McFadden spends some time at the Lynden Skateway to catch a glimpse of what this generation is calling the fountain of youth. Photos by Keith Bolling.

It is 7:30 a.m. on a Saturday, and the smell of stale popcorn, sweat and old, worn-out leather skates still lingers in the Lynden Skateway from the previous night's roller-skating session. A slow waltz begins to play over the intercom, echoing throughout the half-empty skating rink, and as the Pepsi Cola clock strikes 7:35 a.m., a white-haired man in his early 60s rushes into the lobby with a suitcase in hand, whispering under his breath, "I'm late. I'm late.

The small man hastily walks across the lobby, displaying a huge grin that attracts attention to his neatly manicured salt-and-pepper mustache. Dressed to the nines in a pair of neatly pressed gray slacks, a white long-sleeved shirt and black patent leather shoes, Roy Tasker sits down on a carpeted bench and, with a Canadian accent, yells to a fellow skater across the room about his reason for being late. He then crosses one leg over his knee to begin untying his shoes. He quickly unzips his suitcase, flips it open and takes out a pair of black roller skates and a silver thermos full of hot tea.

"It takes a half an hour normally (to get here), but the border was lined up," he says abruptly as he sits with his skates on and pours himself a cup of tea.

Due to the lack of quality roller-skating rinks in Canada, Tasker says he drives to the Lynden Skateway every Saturday morning for lessons. At 61, he says he spends about 15 hours a week skating and brags about the health benefits it offers.

"My doctor thinks its great," he says, as he takes a sip of the hot liquid, smacking his lips together. "I have high blood pressure, and he will take me off the medication if it begins to interfere with my skating."

Roller skating no longer is an activity that teenagers solely enjoy as a weekend outlet but a recreational activity with which senior citizens are falling in love. Skating may be seen as the fountain of youth for members of this generation. It is keeping them young, fit and sociable.

For almost 30 years Pete VanOrnum, his wife, Brenda, and their three daughters have owned and operated the Lyden Skateway.

Out on the polished wood floor, a waltz blares over the intercom. Side by side and hand in hand, Verna Beam, 71, is taking her weekly lesson from her coach Jerry Bruland, 70. Dressed in a yellow shirt with flowers decorated with rhinestones, a navy blue skirt that comes three inches above her knee, beige tights and a pair of white roller skates, Beam is grinning as she skates around to the organ music.

"It is a passion with me," she says, adjusting her rose-colored glasses. "I (skate) every chance I get."

Beam first fell in love with skating as a teenager. When she married and began having children, she said she quit for a while. Just recently, three and a half years ago, she says she began skating again and taking lessons from Bruland.
"It is just the love of skating, just the love of quads," she says, pointing to the four wheels on her skate.

As she comes off the rink to take a break, Beam is glowing. Her neatly curled white hair has not moved an inch, and she skates around the lobby, hugging old friends and chatting with younger skaters. Not only does Beam love to skate, but she says the social aspect is enjoyable, too, and she is so dedicated to her weekly skating sessions that she makes sure she never schedules other activities on these days.

"Don't plan anything for me Tuesday mornings, Saturday mornings, or sometimes Thursday afternoons," she says firmly, "because I may not be (home)."

Beam is so adamant about her skating that she is making sure she skates three times this week because she is going out of town.

"I'm going to miss three nights of skating, and I really miss that," she says as she pushes out her lips like a little girl pouting. "But I'll be back out on that rink Saturday when I get back."

Bruland motions Beam back out to the rink to begin the second part of her lesson in pairs skating. Beam pushes herself with her left skate to gain momentum and whisks back into Bruland's arms.

Growing up, Bruland spent a lot of time skating in his father's rink in Anacortes. For the past 50 years, he has dedicated his time to coaching others.

Wearing a red short-sleeved shirt, blue pants and a pair of black roller skates, the stocky man runs his hand along his short buzz cut. Resembling a general in the army, he skates around the rink with his hands on his hips as he analyzes his students' progress.

One such student is Nora Andrews, 67, who has been skating for approximately 60 years.

Andrews is one of the many Canadians who drive to the Lynden Skateway for weekly lessons. She grew up in Toronto, where she says children would gather in the streets to skate rather than meet at a roller rink.

"I think I was about five when I put my skates on," she says as she places her clasped hands under her chin. "It was street skate then because we couldn't afford to skate in a rink."

Roller skating is a part of Andrews' life, and, she says she is finding comfort from her friends at the Skateway.

"I used to skate with my husband until he passed away in 2001," she says, lowering her voice at the thought of him. "(Skating) becomes a part of your life."

Although she says dealing with her husband's death was difficult, the support she received from her fellow skaters allowed her to get through it.

"We call this our skating family," she says. "I have relationships with a lot of the skaters."
Taking a brief break from her lesson, Andrews is sitting comfortably on a green bench. Her long white hair is neatly tucked under a black headband with the remaining hair pulled back tightly into a ponytail and bound by a rubber band. She is wearing a blue long-sleeved blouse, a red skirt that falls four inches above her knee and beige tights pulled firmly over her skates. Waiting to catch her breath, she says the reason she takes breaks in between her lesson is because of her hip.

"I fell at work and fell on my left hip," she says, grabbing onto the table and leaning back on the bench to point to her hip. "I was working as a nurse at the Langley Hospital in British Columbia, and it developed into arthritis, and it got worse."

In December 2002, her left hip was replaced with an artificial one. Andrews, however, is not letting a fake hip stop her from doing the thing she loves most, roller skating.

"November 1st of last year I put my skates on for the first time," she says. "Initially it was hard to balance, but Bruland worked with me to learn to do the dances."

Although Andrews is one of a few skating with an artificial hip, she says that skating is better than taking physical therapy, and, besides, it is more fun. She says roller skating as therapy may not be good for most people if they do not skate often, but since she says she has been skating most of her life and has Bruland to work with her, it works out for the best.

Still sitting on the bench from earlier, Tasker is slowly sipping his tea as he flirts with some of the women skaters walking into the Skateway.

"I live for this," he says, laughing as he refers to skating. "I skate Saturday for eight and a half hours, four hours on Sunday, another four on Monday and Tuesday for three hours."

Just like his fellow skaters, Tasker has been skating since he was a child and learned to skate on his own at open sessions. He says he will continue to skate, "As long as forever." His body begins to jolt from his laughter. "It is definitely a good place to meet people."

No matter what the weather may be like outside or the time of day, skating at the Lynden Skateway is a passion for many senior citizens. It is a love affair many have found to replace raising a family and tending to a spouse, and many intend to keep on skating until they cannot skate anymore.

"A lot of people I know can't believe I go out and skate," Beam says. "They say, 'Oh you're going to fall and bust something.' And I say, 'No, no, no, I don't intend to fall.' It's a passion with me, and I will continue to do it as long as I can."

And skating is not stopping Tasker from living life to the fullest.

"I have no intention to quit because I want to make it to 100 in this rink," Tasker says confidently as he winks and grins at a woman walking by.

Klipson
Riding 50 or 100 miles on the back of a horse, in all types of weather does not appeal to most people. Join **Rachel Fomon** as she explores the sport of endurance riding and the reasons why people love to do it. Photos courtesy of **Ted and Joyce Brown** and **Katie DeVoe**.

Lazy wind blows through the depths of the dark woods. The black sky peeps through the trees, and a cool drizzle lingers in the air. Fallen trees and purple wildflowers litter the soft trail, and the horse's hooves are muffled in the loose dirt. The thick fog in the distance hides majestic Mount Adams.

Lori Walker stops to let her bay-colored horse, Fancy, munch on a patch of grass she has found along the way. Walker lets her eat for a minute and pulls on her reigns, anxious to get Fancy back on the trail. The duo still has many miles left of their 50-mile ride before they can stop again.

Walker and her 16-year-old Morgan mare compete in the virtually unknown sport of endurance riding.

Endurance riding is a long-distance race on horseback. The all-day or multiple-day event takes the horse-and-rider team through remote countryside terrains and thick forests, stopping at designated rest checks along the way to have a veterinarian check the horse and to allow the rider to rest. To move to the next rest stop and complete the ride, the horse needs to be fit. The rest-time length varies with the distance covered up to that point, weather and terrain. Usually, it ranges from 15 minutes to one hour. The vet also checks the horse an hour after the ride's completion.

Points are given for the horse deemed in the best condition and how fast the team completed the ride. One point is awarded for each mile completed, and bonus points are given for the team that finishes in the top 10.

"There is a ride philosophy that after 10th place, it doesn't matter anymore," Walker says.

Lori Walker rides her horse Fancy, a 16-year-old mare. The duo have made numerous rides together, some as long as 50 miles.
Endurance riding is a fairly obscure sport, and many people do not know about it because it is not a spectator sport, Walker says.

"It's hard to watch because it is over miles of natural course," she says. "No one is going to walk alongside for 50 miles."

Endurance riders are allowed to wear whatever they wish, and a helmet is not mandatory, but recommended.

"I usually wear lots of layers, so I can take them off when it gets warm and put them back on when I get cold," she says. The people who do endurance riding love it for different reasons, she says.

Some riders choose to enjoy the terrain and views from the back of a horse for the day, while others like to compete for victory.

"There's lots of camaraderie involved," Walker says. "It's a fun atmosphere, and everyone is either friends or riding buddies."

According to the AERC Website, the sport of endurance riding was born in 1955, when Wendell Robie organized the first modern-day race. It covered terrain from Lake Tahoe and across the Sierra Nevadas. Today, the sport has expanded all over the world, with approximately 20 rides sponsored by the AERC taking place across North America each weekend.

**Just horsing around**

Walker is a single 37-year-old audiologist living in Everett. The office she works at gives her the flexibility to attend rides far away and visit Fancy at least twice a week.

Her short blonde hair ruffles in the wind, and her bright blue eyes sparkle as she talks about endurance riding with Fancy. Her petite hand pats the horse's side and continuously brushes flies off the horse's face as Fancy munches lazily on the grass inside her pasture at the farm.

"I don't even consider her a pet," she says. "I'm not horse crazy or anything, but Fancy is just really special."

Walker is a member of the "Boobs on Hooves" PNER team, primarily consisting of women riders throughout the Pacific Northwest. The team often travels to rides together, but the members do not ride together.

She says it takes a lot of time and dedication to reach the point of receiving individual and team awards. Walker says she does not race competitively but likes to complete the race with a healthy, happy horse regardless of placing.

To compete for team awards, at least three members of the team need to be present at a ride, but most awards are given to individuals and their horses.

The PNER offers the Sandybar award to the team whose horse was never pulled or disqualified for at least ten consecutive rides. The PNER also offers an award to the top 25 junior riders (16 and younger) and top 15 senior riders (17 and older).

Fancy is boarded at the 60-acre Fish Creek Farm in rural Arlington and lives among 50 other horses. The isolated farm has one gravel trail full of potholes and piles of horse feces leading to the pastures. On both sides of the trail are horses eating grass or napping in the warm sun.

"I like to come and condition her by taking her on rides and feeding her food in addition to hay and alfalfa that the farm provides," she says.

She feeds Fancy a mixture of beet pulp and rice bran in addition to hay to help her gain extra weight. Walker says that a horse conditioned for endurance riding needs to look healthy and have some fat deposits over the ribs.

"I like to go into a ride with a little extra weight," she says. "Then they can gain back weight and even a little extra between rides."

Walker conditions Fancy for endurance riding by taking the horse on
eight- to 30-mile rides through logging roads in the area.

"Horses in endurance can lose a pound a mile during competition," she says. "I don't want her too thin."

Not only is it necessary to keep the horse in good condition but it also is important for the rider to be in shape. Walker does her part by visiting her gym to lift weights and run.

"Being strong helps me stay balanced on the horse even when I am fatigued," she says. "The stronger you are, the longer you can last on the trail."

Rules of the ride

Endurance riders must abide by strict rules in order to participate, and if the rider does not finish the race in the allotted time, the team is disqualified.

At each event offers different ride lengths. Typical rides are 50 miles, but 25-, 30-, 75-, and 100-mile rides are options for riders to choose.

"It all depends what you feel like your horse can do," she says. "But the main point of the race is to have your horse finish in healthy condition."

Sometimes, if the horse does not pass the standards the veterinarians set, it may have to be pulled from a race.

"The horse needs to be in good condition to continue," Walker says. "Otherwise, it can cause major damage to the horse."

At each stop, the horse needs to demonstrate that it is fit to continue and be metabolically stable and sound while trotting. The horse's pulse must recover to a pulse that the vets set, which usually is around 60 beats a minute.

Walker has been pulled from a ride four different times with three different horses.

In her first 75-mile ride, Walker rode a friend's horse. She was exhausted, but finished the ride only to find out she had been disqualified because the horse had pulled a groin muscle in the last five miles.

"I could pinpoint when it happened because I remember the horse slipping and he didn't move the same after that," she says. "When we got disqualified, I kind of pieced it together."

Walker had a hard time facing the fact that they had been disqualified.

"He had taken such good care of me all that time, and I felt like I didn't take good enough care of him," she says. "I felt like I had let him down because he did everything I asked him to."

Endurance riding creates a bond between a horse and rider that is deep and very hard to explain, Walker says.

"She carries me through the entire ride," she says. "There are a lot of things I would never see if she did not take me there."

She says that endurance riding sounds extreme, especially to people who have never heard of it before.

People think we're crazy," she said. "People who don't do it just don't get it."

In It To Win It

Katie DeVoe's quiet voice and shy demeanor fades once she starts talking about her passion for horses and endurance riding.

The 17-year-old has loved horses as long as she can remember. After she begged her parents for a horse when she was 13, they agreed to buy her a horse if she started taking riding lessons.

"I loved it and haven't stopped since," she says.

The Arlington high school senior has devoted much of her life to succeeding in endurance riding since getting her first horse.

A few weeks after she started taking lessons, her instructor asked her to come...
to a ride and check it out. She said it appealed to her because it looked challenging and everyone she saw was having fun.

“Although it is a big commitment, it is like doing a sport after school,” she says. “It takes a lot of time, but it is worth it.”

DeVoe owns three Arabian horses that are boarded at Fish Creek Farm, but rides only Q-Tip on endurance rides. It took approximately one year to condition Q-Tip to be able to compete on 50-mile rides and three years to be conditioned enough for 75- to 100 mile rides.

Every day DeVoe makes the drive from Arlington to the farm to work with her horses. At least two days a week, she works extensively with Q-Tip to condition the horse into endurance-riding shape. Once a week, the two work in the arena doing show exercises to build muscle. On the weekend, she takes Q-Tip riding 25 to 30 miles to keep up the horse’s endurance.

DeVoe’s parents have been supportive of her riding from the start. They have attending every competition except one since she started riding, they wait at the vet checks to help her with the horse so she can relax, eat and use the bathroom. The family travels long distances with their truck and horse trailer to convey their daughter and Q-Tip to endurance riding events. The events take place over the weekend, and usually require camping overnight.

“It’s fun because I get to see people that I don’t usually see unless I’m at a ride,” she says.

Each year since she started endurance riding, she has increased the distance of rides she participates in because she is eager to move up and achieve goals she has set for herself.

“I think I’m insane,” she says. “Next year I want to do 100 miles. I think it’s just the idea of the competition, and the greatest thing is the 100-mile ride.”

Her drive to succeed paid off in her third season of riding when Q-Tip won the junior division Best Condition Horse of the year. DeVoe also was ranked in the top five riders of the junior division two years in a row.

While DeVoe enjoys endurance riding for personal satisfaction, she also thrives on victory. At the beginning of each race, she decides whether to ride competitively by observing how other riders start out the race, if she feels like she can keep pace with them and who the other riders are.

“I live for the competitions and going out and riding,” she says.

Since DeVoe started riding 75 mile rides this year, she does not push her horse to compete hard in them.

“My goals change frequently throughout the day because so much can happen,” she says. “You have to be prepared for anything.”

During one ride when she was leading the group, Q-Tip threw her off and ran away for three hours. Once the horse was found, DeVoe no longer cared about winning because Q-Tip had strained a muscle.

“Endurance riders need to be physically and mentally tough,” she says.

DeVoe’s strength and desire to win was challenged when she got sick at a vet check, with only 13 miles left to ride on a 75-mile ride. She finished but threw up in the woods along the way.

“I couldn’t even stand,” she says. “But I think that’s what makes endurance riders such a small group. You have to get through things like that.”

She plans to surround herself with horses for the rest of her life and wants to become a horse trainer. She said she cannot imagine her life without horses and endurance riding.

“It’s definitely a passion of mine,” she says. “And I hope I can keep riding.”

Katie DeVoe, 17, rides her horse, Q-Tip. Her parents bought her a horse when she was 13 years old. She now owns three Arabian horses but rides only Q-Tip on endurance rides.
The players’ yells clash with the sound of grinding metal as their wheelchairs bang together. Their tires squeak on the gym floor.

"Give it to Tom," one player yells. Tom Carnahan, 39, one of the smaller players, zips down the court ahead of everyone else, grabs the basketball, shoots — and misses.

"I’m off tonight," Carnahan says with mild frustration. Since this is not a real game, the guard with long, graying hair and tan skin is not too frustrated.

The play stops for roughly 30 seconds to allow a player to fix his wheelchair, but quickly resumes. Two teams of five men of all ages, plus one substitute, are strapped into their chairs. They battle for the ball.

Two hours and two games later, the players wheel off the court and transfer to their everyday chairs. Carnahan’s team has lost. "I suggest you all go home and practice," says one of the older players with mock seriousness. "Especially you, Tom."

A not-so-normal athlete

Polio infected Carnahan’s body when he was a baby and weakened the muscles in his legs. Although he has full feeling, he cannot walk on his own.

He says he does not remember having the use of his legs, so his disability does not negatively affect his outlook on life. It has always been this way.

Wheelchairs do not cooperate in the snow and ice of Fairbanks, Alaska, and neither do school buses with ramps, so Carnahan did not use one growing up. Instead, he spent seven minutes each morning strapping on his steel leg braces before the walk to school or the bus stop, aided by a pair of crutches. During the winter, he had to cover the shoes attached to the braces with plastic bread bags to slide them into his winter boots. The braces often snapped and were awkward to walk in.

"I felt like a robot," he says. "They were more embarrassing to wear than anything else. They were just ugly."

At home, he removed the braces and crawled around his house.

When Carnahan moved to Seattle 13 years ago, he traded his braces for a wheelchair. He uses an everyday chair at Wheelchairs Northwest in Bellevue, where he sells chairs, scooters and other mobility devices.

Always ready to play, Carnahan, who now lives in Everett, keeps his basketball chair in his van, which he drives with hand controls. This chair has a lighter frame, lowered seat, angled wheels and high-performance tires, perfect for pivoting and racing down the court for a layup.

Carnahan says he is a normal athlete who leads a normal life. He says he is fortunate.

"I’m going on with life the way it should be, the way I want it to be," Carnahan says. "Some of my clients have it worse than I do."

Sonics All-Star

Years of basketball memories make Carnahan smile.
when he recalls them. One of his favorite memories is playing games at Key Arena in Seattle.

It is halftime at the Sonics’ game — 18,000 fans scream and cheer as the nearly 7-foot-tall players dripping with sweat walk to the locker rooms. Fans leave to buy popcorn and beer and wait for the third quarter to start.

Two teams wearing fresh Sonics jerseys rush out. The fans’ eyes swivel back to the court. The players sit about 4 feet tall in their aluminum-framed basketball wheelchairs. They glance at the bleachers and see a mass of people blurred under the glaring lights. They play best for a crowd. Their eyes focus with intensity on the court.

No. 23, Sonics All-Star forward Tom Carnahan, grips his wheels, his hands ready to snatch the basketball out of the air at the referee’s toss.

The whistle blows, and the players scramble for the ball. The game lasts less than five minutes. But in those five minutes, the players taste more adrenaline than if they were playing in the NBA All-Star game.

“We’re not used to seeing 18,000 screaming fans,” Carnahan says, reflecting four years later at the gym where he and his friends scrimmage. “This is our cubby hole here.”

The players were part of the Sonics-sponsored team of the National Wheelchair Basketball Association.

Dozens of teams play in eight divisions in the NWBA, including the women’s, intercollegiate and junior divisions. All players have permanent lower-extremity disabilities, such as paralysis or an amputated leg.

That was the first year the NBA became involved in the NWBA All-Star game, and Carnahan represented Seattle before hundreds of fans in New York City.

I was so nervous,” he said. “Those guys were so good — they were incredible.”

The exposition (was expo in her original copy) game warmed the fans up for the NBA All-Star game the next day. Carnahan scored two points in his two minutes of playing time. His team, the West, defeated the East. He met Patrick Ewing.

He played four years for the Sonics and “retired” two years ago.

“I just practice to stay fit,” Carnahan says. “We don’t have any spectators anymore. We just play.”

Every Wednesday night, he scrimmages at the gym with his buddies. He cannot help staying involved with the sport. He thrives on the competition and challenge.

“Basketball grabbed me; it was comfortable and fun. And I’m good at it,” he says with a smirk and not much modesty.

It takes perseverance

Most people do not know about disabled sports, Carnahan said, although thousands of athletes around the world compete. The sports are rarely televised. By the time the Paralympics begins, most fans have already left.

“The world is not ready for disabled sports,” Carnahan says.

People gawk when they see wheelchair basketball on television, Carnahan says, and they stare in awe when they find out he plays.

“I ask them, ‘Why don’t you just come out and watch us play?’ ” he says. Basketball is his sport, his passion. He does not let his disability interfere with his life. And like many disabled athletes, he participates in sports because he loves action, not to get therapy.

Disabled athletes have to persever
Forward Tom Carnahan plays with his team, the Sonics, in a practice game. The Sonic sponsored team plays in the National Wheelchair Basketball Association.

through daily struggles that come with a disability, and just participating in the game is a victory. Carnahan says he is fortunate, however, because he lost the use of his legs as a baby. People who are injured later in life and become disabled, he says, have to make serious adjustments; the injury is life-changing. The person suddenly is unable to perform everyday activities such as driving, much less to play a favorite sport.

Mental and emotional recovery depends on that person’s stamina and will. This was the case for Thomas Feller.

The end of a dream

When Thomas Feller was 19, soccer was his life. Years of running six days a week at 5 a.m. and competing in track, soccer, football and basketball had prepared him for a career as a professional athlete. He sometimes wanted to quit on those early morning runs, but his father pushed him to persevere.

“My father said, ‘You can give up, but if you want to be at the head of the pack instead of falling down in exhaustion, you have to run,’” Feller says. Soon he would need to motivate himself to run at all.

On Halloween 1973, in a freak car accident, he drove off a cliff in the Canadian wilderness and broke his left leg in several places. For several weeks, doctors tried to save his leg, but the swelling had caused an infection — gangrene. The doctors said they needed to amputate.

Feller says he asked, “Wait a minute, doc. What’s plan B?” The doctors had no plan B. He could hear his uncle sobbing in the hallway. The news shocked his family. He was still young. He was supposed to be a sports figure someday. He was going to become a physical-education teacher.

That leg was his future.

The day Feller was released from the hospital with a fresh stump just below his left knee, he looked out his hospital room window the last time. He could see the soccer field at Memorial Stadium. It was December and snowing softly. His father brought him the day’s paper with a headline that read, “Seattle to get professional soccer team.” It was to play at Memorial Stadium.

The doctors had told him that he should now reassess his life. Teaching physical education was no longer an option. He had always loved drawing, so he found a job as a graphic designer and photographer at a local paper. He worked there for 13 years.

“But I wasn’t meant to be someone who sits at a desk,” he says in his soft voice.

Growing overweight and out of shape, conditions he had never struggled with before, Feller used work to escape from the reality of losing his leg.

“I was going to become a casualty because of my disability,” he says.

“Soccer with a passion”

“I had changed in less than six months from being somebody who was giving up on life to somebody who was training hard to be the best athlete that I could.” -Thomas Feller

Feller’s father called one day in 1985 and told him “I want you to go to your old high school stadium. Now.”

At the stadium, Feller saw his first amputee soccer game, or football as the world calls it: El Salvador versus the United States. The players were using crutches to kick the ball, and the goalie had only one arm. Using a crutch to kick the ball instead of a leg adds 20 mph to the kick, sending soccer balls across the field at speeds of 100 mph.

“It wasn’t soccer for the disabled,” Feller says. “It was soccer with a passion.”

Watching the game stirred his passion that had been buried and forgotten for 13 years, and he immediately want
Thomas Feller plays with his 4-year-old daughter, Helen. Feller lost his leg in 1973 after a car accident. A skiing injury has prevented Fuller from playing soccer this year but he is highly involved in the International Amputee Football Federation.

Soon, that is what he did. He tried out and made the U.S. team of the International Amputee Football Federation, and within weeks his teammates had voted him captain. In one game against the English, Feller scored the only U.S. goal.

“I had changed in less than six months from being somebody who was giving up on life to somebody who was training hard to be the best athlete that I could,” he says.

From the Paralympics in Athens, Greece, to Africa

Sitting in a folding chair in his front yard in Edmonds, surrounded by his roses, Feller, now 49, white-haired and skin-tanned, takes a break from playing with his 4-year-old daughter, Helen. He says his life transformed after he started playing soccer again. That success sparked his interest in many sports, including skiing and hiking. It also shifted his focus away from himself.

“Everything I did from the moment I started playing soccer again was to help the lives of people with disabilities,” Feller says.

He became a level two ski instructor and instructed disabled athletes during the winter. Over the years, he tested prosthetic limbs at the University of Washington, helping engineers to develop the best-performing foot.

The IAFF threatened to fold in 1991, but Feller and his teammates could not let that happen.

“They told me I had to make sure it didn’t die for other amputees,” he says. “They knew my passion for the game. They knew I was a little like a pit bull; I would grab on and wouldn’t let go.”

So Feller took over the organization and still works with the IAFF today. Now, he is focusing on making amputee football an event in the 2004 Paralympics in Athens, Greece. The Paralympics, international competition for physically disabled athletes, takes place a week after the regular Olympics in the same location.

A skiing injury this winter sidelined Feller from competition. But he has not spent any less time working with football teams.

This past year, he traveled for the IAFF to Angola, an African country where landmines kill and injure thousands of people a year. According to the International Red Cross, one in 334 people in Angola is an amputee — more than 32,000 people. There he led a two-week skills, nutrition and training camp for three amputee football teams and their coaches.

“I like helping people go out and do what they did before their injuries,” Feller says. “I tell people, ‘Now you get to go out and prove yourself in different ways.’ There was no one to tell me that. It took me many years before I started feeling good about myself.”

“No longer disabled”

Although stereotypes about disabled athletes probably exist, Carnahan says he cannot identify them. He does notice eyes drawn to the wheelchair occasionally. But he would rather focus on his abilities than his disability.

Since his youth, he has enjoyed tennis, bowling and swimming and raced his wheelchair in several marathons, including the Seattle Marathon.

“I just enjoy sports, period,” he says. “I’m not any different from any other athlete.”

For both men, the key to success as an athlete is perseverance.

“When you lose a function of your body, you have to make an adjustment,” Feller says. “You have to look at life from a different perspective.”

Feller’s transformation from a disabled person to an athlete changed his life.

“I don’t know if it was the soccer or the skiing or the fact that I was impacting people’s lives,” he says. “I was no longer disabled.”
Erotic aerobics
Western Washington University student Jessica Iverson sits on the black chair in her room and pulls her dark hair into a tight ponytail on top of her head. She gives herself a look in the mirror and adjusts her gray sweatpants before heading to the Wade King Student Recreation Center to attend her weekly class, urban funk aerobics.

"The most exciting thing about the class is that I get to change into my alter ego, Stripperella," Iverson says. "I signed up for the class to get into 'stripper shape.'"

She opens the door, and a cool gust of wind whistles as it enters her house. Iverson smiles and zips up her black fleece, ready to brave the cold weather.

"I feel sore after taking the class," she says, smiling. "I feel invigorated, and it seems to give people a positive body image. There is a lot of positive energy because everybody cheers each other on and makes them feel sexy, so it's not like you feel intimidated or anything."

Taking it off

Women nationwide are shedding their preordained thoughts about what aerobics is supposed to be. The longtime Jane Fonda workout has been revised to include unfamiliar, racy moves that exercise the mind and body in a sexy, stripper-hot fashion. The unconventional approach strip aerobics takes is gaining popularity at lightning speed.

Although poles and high heels are not a necessity in this red-hot form of aerobics, an open mind and the willingness to get down, dirty and healthy, are. This fad was born in such cities as Los Angeles and New York, and by its preteen years was oozing with status and success. The class recently has become an infectious trend, altering fitness programs nationwide where participants are taking it all off — taking off the weight, that is.

Women of all ages are coming together to dance to the music of Donna Summer, crawl on the floor and swing their hips in ways they have never seen. The women learn pelvic thrusts and leave their hair down, so when they toss their heads around, it can look sexy. The lights are off and the loud music permeates the air, creating an ambiance similar to that of a nightclub.

"Bumping and grinding" takes on a new meaning for these women as they learn that their butts will most definitely shake, sway and thrust like they never thought possible.

The beginning

Strip aerobics' first appearance was in Los Angeles' Crunch Gym, but it is most commonly linked to former Baywatch star Carmen Electra. Electra was rehearsing for her dance troupe, Pussycat Dolls, when, according to a Los Angeles Times article, she says she noticed she was getting into great shape by doing moves similar to those of a stripper. She recorded and launched a series of workout videos with the help of choreographer Robin Antin, which combine cardio exercise with sensuous dance.

Since then, more gyms have opened their doors to this class in hopes that the women intrigued by the sexy style and bold moves would step out of their comfort zones and step into the excitement that is strip aerobics.

The Seattle instructor

Tricia Murphy, 29, an aerobics teacher and part owner of the Urban Fitness gym in Seattle, has been teaching aerobics since she was 17 and taking dance for 22 years. Murphy began teaching a "cardio striptease" class upon her return from Los Angeles in December 2002. She ventured into a club during her stay, and upon seeing some awesome dance moves, she recognized this form of dance as having strong potential to be a huge success in Seattle.

"Urban striptease is a complete workout program that uses basic original striptease moves to create an exciting, powerful workout," she says.

Starbucks-loving Seattleite women have shown strong interest in the class and have shed their parkas and raincoats to get down and sexy in a new environment where they can become a "hot stripper" for a few hours and laugh with the other women who share the same motives of just trying to keep in shape.

Murphy says that after countless hours of research in strip clubs all over the country, she knew the time spent was worth it. She went to strip clubs and discovered how to create a program that uses striptease moves while incorporating athletic movements at different intervals.

"We have received nothing but positive feedback about the class," she says. "We have an age range from 20 to 75, short, tall, big and small, and even my mom wants to take the class."

Besides the fact that "sex sells," Murphy says that women need to be able to express themselves in a safe environment that promotes health and well-being. It is more empowering than it is erotic, she says.

"You receive a lot of energy to take on your daily life," she says. "I can feel the stress drip away from my body as I take the class."

Murphy attributes the strong following of women nationwide to the feelings people encounter in the class. The hidden desire to look "stripper hot" slowly unveils itself as more and more women acquire a newfound love for shaking their rear ends to the sound of old-school hip-hop. The women in the class seem to burst with energy and self-esteem, pushing the proverbial Jane Fonda workout aside and relishing in the freshness of cardio striptease.

The class

Twenty young college women fill the room. All around them are mirrored walls, which place their insecurities and uncomfortable attitudes about their bodies in front of them. They cannot
they perform a routine. Many of the moves they perform are similar to moves in striptease classes in Los Angeles.

The young women subtly glance at one another, making it unobvious that they are staring at one another's butts, seeing who has the bigger one. In an instant, the seemingly uncomfortable atmosphere changes, and they whip their heads forward, looking toward the instructor at the front of the room.

The lights are flicked off, and the music comes on. The bass causes reverberations under their bare feet. Wearing no shoes helps them grip the floor, their instructor informs them. All of the young women's toenails are carefully painted, casting an array of bright reds, pinks and purples across the cold, hardwood floors. The fans above generate a cool breeze that passes through their hair.

"I hope you guys layered up today," the instructor says. "I'm going to show you how to take it off. OK, let's start with a saucy walk ... come on, warm up your butts, ladies!"

The women walk to the front of the room, giggling as they attempt a "saucy" walk that at least somewhat resembles the instructor's. Laughter echoes in the room. They now seem confident with their abilities and comfortable in their bodies. A series of moves that have the young women crawling on their knees and rolling onto their backs follows the "saucy walk." They begin to sweat as the workout aspect of the sexy dance sets in.

The Bellingham instructor

Eliza Junkerman, 20, fitness instructor at Western Washington University's recreation center, says being a student allowed her to recognize that young college women were looking for a more exciting workout. Although the urban funk aerobics class that she teaches is far from the striptease classes in Los Angeles, it maintains the same ideals, stepping out of mainstream fitness routines and allowing women to work out in an entertaining and uplifting environment.

"This is my most energetic class," she says. "It's a really enthusiastic and supportive group. No one feels they'll be shut out or judged."

Having taken "cardio striptease" in Seattle, she says she knew she had to implement a similar class on campus.

"I like it because it's not like any other class," she says. "I don't even have any dance experience. My dance experience is like the little tutus that your parents used to put you in. That's it. I just wanted the girls to benefit physically, as I did."

Knowing this class could be considered a little risqué, she describes how feelings of awkwardness are common among participants.

"When I first took the class, when you're warming up and moving your hips, I noticed that everyone's face turns a little red," she says. "You start to giggle because you're not sure if you're going to get the routine. It's a little bit 'out there,' and you're like, 'I can't believe I'm doing this.'"

Although nervousness set in at first, toward the end of the class the women were down to their sports bras, hooting and hollering, she says.

"The name can be misleading," she says. "There are no poles, and you don't have to come all sexed up. It's a workout; you come in clothes that you feel comfortable in."

Each person reacts differently to the class and the nature of the routines, but in the end, it is still a healthy workout, she says.

"This is not a class that I would broadcast to my grandpar-

Girls in the urban funk aerobics class flip their hair as they perform a routine. Many of the moves they perform are similar to moves in striptease classes in Los Angeles.
ents that I am teaching," she says. "My parents are happy that I am working out, and my boyfriend is proud of the fact that his girlfriend is teaching such a cool class."

The full-body involvement, the loud music, the laughter, the occasional embarrassment and the originality of the class are all components leading to its success. Going beyond that, this class is for women of all ages and sizes, she says. The diversity of ages proves that all women are trying to unearth a passion for getting healthy and feeling sexy while doing it, she says.

"The girls love the feeling they get," Junkerman says. "They come up to me after class and thank me and tell me they can't wait for the next week. It's empowering in this all-women environment."

Junkerman says she had to be careful, however, when she presented the idea to her coordinator.

The fitness coordinator

"The private gyms are generating these trends," says Ron Arnold, a fitness coordinator at the recreation center. "Universities want so bad to stay up with these trends, but it is harder. The private fitness centers can try out anything, but the universities are still a bit behind because they have a unique population."

A mixture of following university policies, following a code of ethics and handling all reactions to the idea did not make it easy for the class to gain approval.

The idea of the class was beautiful, but the terminology that coincided with it was less attractive, he says.

"If it's a demand the students want and you can do it right, it should be something you give the students the opportunity to take advantage of," he says.

He says he stands firm in his decision that offering this opportunity only to college women is beneficial. It will allow them to grow more confident and feel more secure in an all-female class, he says, which is a positive thing to enforce.

"When you enjoy a class, it helps stimulate the release of 'happy hormones,' " he says. "This means you leave the class high-spirited, energetic, and you get a work out, too."

Mixing enjoyment and fitness is a sure way to get people to come back. Arnold says.

The cool down

The class is coming to a close, and Junkerman warns the women that it is almost time to go. Their bodies are dripping with sweat at this point in the routine, yet they go back for more.

"Are you guys feeling good?" Junkerman asks.

"Woo, yah!" they echo in response.

They strut to the back of the room and take it from the top one last time. They have successfully mastered the art of "saucy walking" and even have accomplished the daunting task of slapping the ground so hard that it hurts but looks sexy at the same time. The energy is overflowing, and the music tempts them to do more, caring not about the bruises their knees surely will endure. The music stops, closing the class for the evening.

The women's inner thighs are in excruciating pain the next morning. Their arms are aching, and they can barely extend them over their heads to put on a sweatshirt. The participants in the class did not realize that flailing their arms about, trying to look hot, could cause them to be sore.
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