

RANDOM SAMPLES

TOLEDO NATIVE HAS MEDAL TO PROVE ANYONE CAN BE AN OLYMPIAN

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There's a little Olympian inside all of us.

Sometimes there may be reason to doubt it, like when I tried to ski in Colorado a couple of years ago and found myself falling, fumbling, and stumbling my way down the side of a mountain for more than two hours. And that was just my first trip down.

But don't give up hope. As the 2010 Winter Games come to a close this weekend in Vancouver, it's a reminder that if Ethiopia can have a cross-country skier, anyone can be an Olympian. Even a Toledoan.

Jim Millns knows this because he's done it.

While everyone knows the story of Bowling Green's Scott Hamilton, this less-known Toledo native won the bronze medal in ice dancing with partner Colleen O'Connor during the 1976 Olympics in Innsbruck, Austria.

"I was your kid next door," he says. "Anyone, ANY ONE, can be an Olympian. Anyone. And that needs to be underlined."

The son of a Kroger Co. distribution supervisor in West Toledo, Jim learned to skate at the age of 3 and later spent innumerable evenings out in the cold with his grandmother, who lived a few blocks away and created a rink in her backyard using a sheet of plastic and some wood.

He was inspired to take lessons around the age of 12 and pursued figure skating rather than hockey because, well, what guy wouldn't prefer hanging out with cute girls in short skirts over big sweaty guys trying to hit you?

Jim moved to Illinois for high school, and continued to skate on weekends while studying electrical engineering in college. Things didn't get serious until about a year after graduation when he and his partner decided to give up everything and move to Colorado. There he spent 50 hours a week on the ice — including sessions from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m. — along with another 10 hours of training off of it, all the while working as a bellhop. It was not a luxurious existence.

"Literally every penny I made went to skating," he remembers. "For a couple of weeks, my diet consisted of Wheaties and cherry Kool-Aid."

Somehow, some way, things worked out. Jim and Colleen worked hard, ended up with the right coach in the right environment, and in less than six months they were national champions, rising out of almost total obscurity. When they nabbed bronze in the Winter Games, it was a monumental victory — one that wouldn't be matched by American ice dancers for 30 years.

Now 61 and coaching skating in the Tampa area after years working for Verizon as a program manager, Jim still believes that absolutely anyone can follow in his footsteps.

I'll spare him the details of my own traumatizing skiing experience. And my feeble attempts at ice skating. And how the closest I've come to playing hockey is a video game.

I'll forgo all that and say: He's right. Each of us has that potential, and it goes beyond being an Olympian to acting like one.



The Olympics represent what is best in sport and in ourselves, which is why I love watching them so much. Beyond the thrill of seeing the world's best athletes, over and above the amazement at witnessing Shaun White's Double McTwist 1260, and past the passionate patriotism on display, the Olympics offer the unspoken promise of seeing someone give their all and do it with a purity of spirit that often is absent in our win-at-all-costs world. They are a testament to dedication, sacrifice, effort, and good old-fashioned hard work in pursuit of a dream.

Even the clumsiest among us can be that kind of Olympian. Which, hopefully, means that I can retire my ski goggles.

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