

Rehabilitative Exercises Become Challenge For Weightlifter Joe Russel

By Jalyne Strong
Post Staff Writer

"My name is Joe Russel. I am paralyzed from my chest down, the result of an auto accident eight years ago. I am 27 years old. Even though I use a wheelchair, braces and crutches, I am a proficient weightlifter in the bench press."

This is how Joe Russel, currently living in Charlotte, expresses, in brief, his life story to this point. However, "proficient weightlifter" doesn't quite reveal the full weight of Russel's accomplishments.

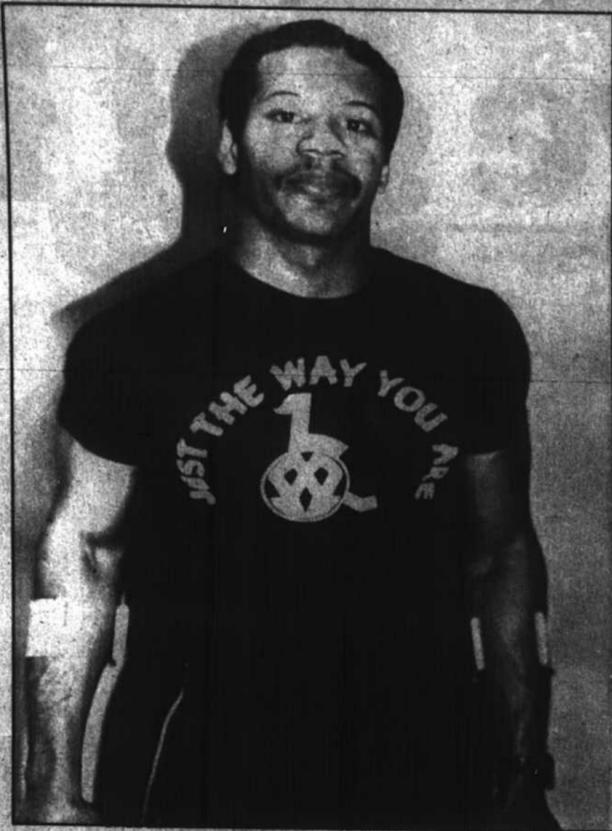
When the car accident in 1976 took away Russel's use of his legs, his therapist instructed him to use weight lifting as a method to help strengthen his arms and upper torso, building the muscles necessary to support his body on crutches.

The rehabilitative exercises soon became a type of challenge for Russel as he found that he could increase the amount of weights he was lifting with some effort.

His own determination, and little else, took the 125 pound Russel to his first weightlifting competition in Georgia in 1980. There he placed first in the featherweight competition by lifting 230 pounds. He has since competed in the National Wheelchair Games in Seattle, Wash., placing third by lifting 245 pounds and he won a gold medal at the National Wheelchair Games in Hawaii in 1983. Plus Russel won a bronze medal in the International Wheelchair Games in England in 1983, for lifting 292 pounds.

It's taken Russel's full discipline, dedication and concentration to have come this far. Yet the accolades have proven to him that as a physically disabled person he is still able to accomplish extraordinary feats. He is proudest of the fact that in 1983, he tied the North Carolina Abled Bodied record by lifting 280 pounds.

Now that he is fully aware of his capabilities, Russel has other pressing interests. He explains, "I want to get the black community involved in wheelchair athletics."



Joe Russel
.....Proficient weightlifter

Through all his competitions, that have taken him all over the world, Russel points out, "I have been the only black competitor." With over 350,000 physically handicapped individuals in North Carolina, one wonders why more blacks are not involved in the "handicapped" activities.

Russel feels it is for several reasons. "Many people don't know

about the wheelchair athletics," he says, admitting, "For a number of years I didn't know about them." To educate people, blacks in particular, about wheelchair sports is now one of Russel's goals. He's become involved in weightlifting exhibitions at various locations to show the benefits of exercise for the physically impaired.

He's planning to be in the Ame-

rican Fitness exhibition at Springfest this year. Russel has already demonstrated at the Charlotte Rehabilitation Hospital and at the Alexander Children Center. He was also instrumental in starting a physical education class for the handicapped at Central Piedmont Community College.

His message is, "Exercise is good for you. It makes you feel better. But most importantly, it makes you feel good about yourself. And if a person with a disability doesn't use the parts of the body that work, additional health problems will develop."

"Many people think things can't get worse," Russel states. "But they can."

To his dismay, Russel has found through his experiences that too many black physically handicapped individuals strive only to maintain bare existence. "Always thinking about how to pay the rent and other bills leaves little time to expand one's thoughts into other areas," he reasons.

Russel's hoping he'll set an example for others, stating, "There's more to do than just stay home. Whatever your interest is, you can do it." He stresses, "Change your disabilities into capabilities."

Always athletically inclined, Russel calls his paralysis "a little inconvenience." Aside from his weightlifting prowess, he has competed in table tennis, shotput, javelin and discus contests. Russel, a member of the TRIAD Wheelchair Athletic Association, plays with the TRIAD Smoker's Basketball team and, also with the National Wheelchair Basketball Athletic Association, he is a member of the Carolina Tarheels basketball team.

With his desire to get more blacks

involved in wheelchair athletics, Russel does not negate the expense of the activities, one final reason why there aren't many blacks involved.

There were many times when Russel didn't have the funds necessary for travel expenses to compete in a contest until the very last minute. Presently, he's working with WGIV radio station, in a fund raising effort to sponsor his trip to Belgium to compete in the European Weightlifting Championships. He was glad that Marsha Burton of WGIV was "very receptive and eager to help out" when he called about this endeavor. And Russel would like to see more of that type of enthusiasm from the black community as a whole.

"I'd like to see more support financially from the black community to help wheelchair athletics so that others with physical impairments can get involved in the sports," comments Russel.

"You get more from wheelchair sports than exercise and competition. It is also good social exercise," reveals Russel. "To be able to travel and meet people plus learning to compete and knowing there's no limit to what you can do if the desire is there."

Russel puts no limits on himself. He has competed and continues to compete in weightlifting and basketball and other sports. He once worked at Wachovia Bank as a proof operator. The job, however, interfered with his ability to travel frequently.

Now Russel maintains that he wants to work again plus he's decided what type of work he likes best. "I like working with people. I'd like a job with an airline which would help out with traveling," he

informs.

If Russel is fortunate enough to become employed with a company which would also help sponsor him for competitions, he feels that he could greatly benefit that business. He assures, "Their name would appear in the paper each time mine does. You can't put a dollar amount on the free publicity which will also show their good will towards the physically handicapped."

With his plans for more travel and competition, securing employment, and increased community involvement, Russel says he is expanding his talents and abilities, sharing them with others, using them for good.

He expresses, "Life is God's gift to us and our gift to Him is what we do with it."

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Reggie Mobley Among 10 State Finalists In DECA Competition

By Jalyne Strong
Post Staff Writer

Reggie Mobley remembers that just last year, as a tenth grader at Harding High School, he didn't participate in any extra-curricular activities. "I thought only studious people could be active in such things," he claims. But this year, when he decided to reach for an opportunity, Reggie came away with the brass ring.

Through his involvement with DECA and the Freedom Mall's Teen Advisory Board, Reggie has become one of North Carolina's ten state finalists in the DECA competition. An achievement that will take him to San Francisco, Cal., to compete in the finals.

Reggie has learned, "It doesn't take a genius to get in these activities," he relates. "It takes a person who is not afraid to try different things, a person who is willing to accept others' opinions and a person who is willing to put forth the effort to do something for him or herself."

Like one of the main characters in the "Wizard of Oz," Reggie had the ability within him all along. It just took some significant persons to pull it out. One such person was his MDE Coordinator at school, Ms. Cheeseman. "Ms. Cheeseman recommended that I apply for the Freedom Mall Advisory Board," Reggie explains.

He was to fill out an application and then interview with Ms. Jean Reynolds, marketing director for Freedom Mall.

Says Jean Reynolds, "Reggie was the only male applicant and I initially thought having one man on the board would cause problems. But the idea went right out of my head after I talked to Reggie for two minutes."

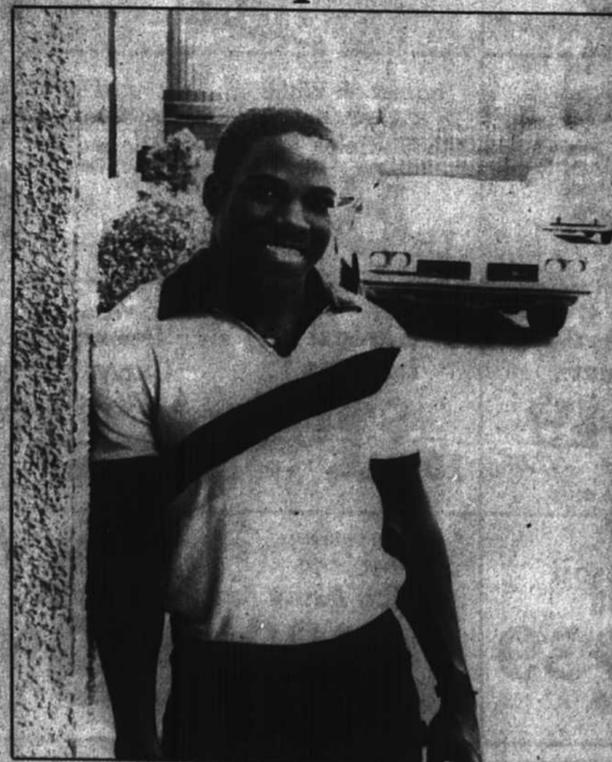
Reggie became the only male member of 13 students on the Teen Advisory Board, and not only that, he was also promptly nominated as the chairman of the board.

Reynolds now says, "Reggie is one of the nicest young people I've met. He's a bright star. I can't sing his praises loudly enough."

To Reynolds' compliments, Reggie responds in kind, "She's great. Mrs. Reynolds and Ms. Cheeseman are two of a kind. They've helped me so much."

Many people have become enamored with Reggie and since his winning the trip to San Francisco they've rallied around to aid him. "Mrs. Reynolds and the Freedom Mall's Merchant Association have given me \$150 to cover food expenses in San Francisco. I've received a \$400 scholarship from an association that aids minority students. The Executive Council of Harding has donated \$100," recounts Reggie. Mrs. Reynolds' husband offered Reggie to pick any pair of shoes he'd like from Kinney Shoe Store and Fran Farrer-Bradley, advertising manager for The Charlotte Post, is treating Reggie to a shopping trip for clothes.

"I'm very grateful to them all,"



Reggie Mobley
.....Reached for an opportunity

expresses Reggie. "The trip would have cost \$700 but I don't have to worry about it because it's been all taken care of."

Reggie, employed with International House of Pancakes, entered the state DECA competition in the category of Restaurant - Marketing Master Employee. The competition involved a series of written events and a performance test. "I thought the competition was fairly easy," says Reggie. "But I hear the finals are going to be a lot tougher. I'll have to use my time wisely and study. I'm a little nervous."

He may be feeling a little trepidation about the upcoming contests, yet Reggie reveals that he's earned the opportunity. "I'm due for it," he stresses. "I put in a lot of hard work, kept my grades up and tried very hard to do what was asked of me."

His work with Freedom Mall's Teen Advisory Board has included

participating in a special promotion for Walden Book Store which was the most successful promotion for the store in the city. Reggie and the other members of the board are now preparing for a large fashion show involving 24 stores from the mall.

About being the only male on the board, Reggie smiles, "Hey, I love women. I'm glad I was selected. I get along well with all the ladies and enjoy working with them."

The entire experience is a great opportunity for Reggie. And presently he is enjoying being recognized for his achievements. "It's changed my life greatly," he emphasizes. "Teachers have more confidence in me now. And I feel good about myself because this was something I did on my own."

Now in the position to advise, 17 year old Reggie urges, "Students get involved in anything you can. It's worth the trouble you go through for it."

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