

April 29, 2002

From Bob Condron, Director of Media Services - USOC

To: Charlie Hubner, Chief Executive Officer - USOC, Lloyd Ward, - USOC, Heather Ross - USOC and Kirk Bauer, Executive Director - Disabled Sports USA

I don't know exactly where this compliment should go...so I'll share it with all of you.

At the Olympic events in Washington DC, I met a Paralympic skier named Joe Tompkins. We struck up a conversation and he said he was coming to Colorado Springs in a few days. I said that we had to get together and I'd show him the training center and visit with him before he left for his home in Juneau, Alaska.

Joe called the day we got back and said he was in the Springs. He had lined up speaking engagements with two elementary schools that Friday. He had been a regular at one of the schools because the teacher was from Alaska. He added two middle schools on Monday and paid for a hotel out of his own pocket to stay over the weekend in order to be able to do this. He was coming to play a round of golf with some of our staff and ended up booking four classes at schools all around Colorado Springs.

Today he spoke to my wife's class at Holmes Middle school. He talked about the dangers of alcohol and what it did to him. He said he was riding with a drunk driver who got in a wreck, killed his best friend and destroyed his major league baseball prospects.

He told the kids to study hard and they can be anything they want to be. Then he went out and hit golf balls in the schoolyard and gave every kid in the sixth grade an autographed golf ball. These weren't driving range balls, they were Titleists, Spaldings and Wilsons. He putted with these balls.

At a school Friday, after he told the second grade students that they could be anything they wanted, a small hand shot up and asked, "can I be a doctor." Joe said, Yes, you can be anything." She said, "when I become a doctor can I make your back well." Joe said, "yes you can...you can be the one."

Joe's an example of everything we want in an athlete and in a human being. He gives and gives and never asks for anything. He works at a fishing camp in Alaska to pay many of the costs it takes at the Winter Park training site. I copied some pictures of him in action that he could autograph for kids. They follow him around like a large puppy.

My wife said they followed Joe around for two hours and the only reason he left was that he had to go to another class before he drove 20 hours to Seattle this afternoon. Because of Joe, one of those students may make him well some day. Another one might just become a good father and contribute to society. Another one may think about Joe in his wheelchair and make up his mind that he can go from the barrio to Harvard.

I wanted to help Joe and was able to in some small ways. I'm going to help him with a press kit that tells people who he is and what he does. Maybe put together a bio and scrape up some photos that he could use. But, don't think that's enough and I'm asking anyone for ideas.

Joe doesn't charge anyone. He speaks to businesses, to schools, to AA meetings, to guys and girls on the street. He's the biggest champion I've ever met. If there is a way to do something, please let me know. I know there are a lot of deserving people out there, but this guy would never ask. In fact, he goes out of his way not to talk about himself. He just wants to tell kids about alcohol and to stay in school and study. He's something. He's the best of what we all could be.

April 30, 2002 - Kirk Bauer responded to Bob's email requesting approval to print the testimonial in the Disabled Sports USA's Challenge Magazine: Bob, What a wonderful letter and tribute. With your permission, I would like to print this in the next edition of "Challenge" Magazine by DS/USA.

Joe is everything you say he is and has been one of the shining stars on the U.S. Disabled Ski Team in this regard. By the way, did you ever play golf? And how did it go?!

Kirk

May 1, 2002 - Bob Condron's Email (Testimonial) to Kirk Bauer: I had the most amazing experience playing golf with Joe. I had never played with anyone in a wheelchair and didn't know what to do. I didn't want to screw up and run over him, or knock him into a gully and lose him.

But, he got on the first tee and just smoked the ball. He locked his wheelchair, swung left-handed and just cracked it down the middle. Then he said, "Let's go" and grabbed the cart and away we went. **He took his wheelchair on the green and it didn't make any more marks than regular golf shoes.**

I think he ended up shooting around 100, but it should have been better. He beat Kevin Neuendorf from our office, so Kevin has been out practicing ever since. I don't think I've ever had a better time playing golf. We got stuck in sand traps twice. That was the only tough part.

The sand was soft and he sunk down to the spokes and he was pushing and I was pulling and laughing. I asked him if I could just get the ball and throw it out and he said, "hey, if I didn't want to be in the trap, I shouldn't have hit it there." He didn't give himself any slack.

The whole day was just amazing. He got up on the 17th tee as we were about to finish and the whole clubhouse overlooks the green.

There were several high school teams practicing putting and the whole group stood in wonder as Joe drove his wheelchair up to the tee. I could hear him whispering, "don't screw up, don't screw "

He ended up hitting his best drive of the day. He might have changed some lives with that shot. We all just acted like it was normal and then we just broke up going down the fairway. He was thanking God all the way for not whiffing it.

I hit one shot that was about as sorry as you could get and I started to complain about my bad hip. The words were just about to pass my lips and I thought, "what the heck are you doing. Here's a guy without the use of his legs, a shattered right arm with pins and metal throughout, major league baseball shot to heck and I'm about to complain because my hip hurts a little. "

The only thing Joe complained about was ... actually, I don't think he complained about anything. Not even the sand traps. Whatta day. It changed my life.

Bob Condron, PR Department, USOC