

What Would It Hurt? by Randy Snow

I am thrilled with *Murderball*. Finally, with crystal clarity, the public can savor the life of the wheelchair athlete void of melodrama and pity. To offer a familiar cliché, at some point along the way I forgot this movie was about people in wheelchairs. *Murderball* is like *Starbucks*, it's everywhere.

I could relate to everything that was said, especially Scott Hogsett who seemed to iterate exactly what I've been thinking for years. Well, just about everything.

One night as I watched one of the stars being interviewed on television, I thought what a platform - to be able to influence so many. His musings on sports, parties and travel were warmly amusing. I heard that life has its ups and downs but for the most part, it's a pretty good time.

I was reminded of a similar film, perhaps not as spectacular, but about athletes, nonetheless. It was a film called *Choosing Victory* which shared the trials of athletes like Candace Cable, George Murray, Jim Knaub, Rick Hansen and myself, competing in the first ever event in the Olympics in 1984. Certainly stars of *Murderball* are saying "Rick who?", but the event was, and still remains, a significant milestone.

After winning a silver medal in the men's event, the 1500-meters, similar to our recent stars, many media moments were afforded. One of those was an invitation to speak in Washington D.C. in support the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Because of my sports accomplishments I was thrust into unfamiliar territory.

At a nationally covered hearing, silver medalist Flo Hyman enlightened us of the issues facing women. Then, Senator Ted Kennedy spoke of the bi-partisan compassion politicians must shoulder with regard to accessibility. Justin Dart, vanguard of the ADA, followed with a message of vigilance concerning the rights of all individuals. Then I spoke of what I knew: preparation, sacrifice, the Olympic experience and the rewards.

Later someone challenged me by saying, "You missed it. It was your responsibility to mention accessibility and sports facilities, transportation, and attendant care -- the problems of healthcare for people with disabilities. You could have made a bigger difference."

Immediately I reflected on the comment and decided that, albeit an important event, just because I'm here, I don't think it's my responsibility to represent all people with disabilities. I'm an athlete.

When I am around misbehaving nieces and nephews at a family gathering, is it Uncle Randy's responsibility to discipline them? Upon hearing a racial slur or a demeaning statement in my presence, is it my responsibility to make a stand? What if Coach Jim Hayes at the University of Texas in Arlington contacts me to participate in a Disability Awareness Day, do I say, "No thanks Coach - it's someone else's turn?" No, it isn't my

responsibility.

But I do believe these are opportunities.

Think about it. Let's say a friend asks me to attend a special function in his honor. As I'm perusing through my wardrobe, do I choose the Khakis and a golf shirt? Or do I make the effort and respect him with a suit? Definitely, the suit is more of an effort, keeping the coat out of my wheels, the shirt tail out of the toilet and all wheelchair users know about carrying dry cleaning.

I'll ask you though - is wearing the suit an opportunity? Metaphorically speaking, my choice of cloths is a statement; casual cloths -- casual respect. Whether going casual or dressing up, it's not my responsibility but it is my opportunity.

Marilyn Hamilton, founder of Quickie Designs, at one time attended a program held by Tony Robbins, motivational speaker and known for challenging his participants to face fears by walking across hot coals. When it was Marilyn's time to walk, not wanting to ruffle the others, she said, "No thanks, I can't walk anyway." Tony replied, "We'll get around that - we will carry you." Marilyn said, "No, that's okay."

Tony then said, "What would it hurt if you did?" Later Marilyn told me, "I didn't have an answer for him." She knew right then that walking across the rocks was the right thing to do.

The following appeared in a recent magazine. "*Murderball*...was an uplifting movie, and displayed...that quadriplegics can do more than just lie in bed... However, I also think it may have presented an unfair concept of what it is like to be a quadriplegic...in particular, the attendant care issue which is well-known to most quads continues to hide in the shadows."

Maybe it isn't our responsibility to wear the advocacy suit of clothes. Nevertheless, it is a tremendous opportunity to influence the thinking of not only hundreds but perhaps hundreds of thousands as well. Remember, it never ends.

If I had it to do over again, I would like to think that I would take advantage of that opportunity in Washington. After all, what would it hurt if I did?