Team Norman Sonic takes Tyler by storm

Tandem teams qualify for national, world championship events
By Tom Blakey
Transcript Staff Writer

Team Norman Sonic participated in its second competition of the 2007 Firefighters Combat Challenge season Aug. 31 and Sept. 1 at the Broadway Square Mall in Tyler, Texas.

"We once again fielded three tandem teams and one relay team," said Team Norman Sonic member Bob Callaghan.

The open division tandem team placed third, Callaghan said. The open team was comprised of Robert Carrick and Bobby Smith -- who took the place of Jack Ingram who was unable to make the event.

The "Over 40" Team also finished in third place, Callaghan said. The Over 40 team was comprised of Don Balm and Kurt Holley -- who took the place of Brent Porter due to an injury.

The "Over 50 team," comprised of Callaghan and Greg Blackburn, won their event.

"Our time was good enough to finish second in the Over 40 as well," Callaghan said.

The 1:47 time Callaghan and Blackburn posted is the second fastest in the nation this year for the Over 50 tandem.

The relay team, composed of Smith, Carrick, Balm, Holley and Blackburn, finished in eighth place out of 20 teams.

"Most of the relay teams are the open competitors -- young guys -- so we were pleased to make the final round of eight," said team member Blackburn. "All of the tandems have now qualified for the national championships next month in Atlanta and the world championships in Vegas."

The world championships will be held under the lights of the Fremont Street Experience in downtown Las Vegas and televised nationwide on the Vs Channel (formerly, Outdoor Life Network) Nov. 4-8.

The Firefighters Combat Challenge consists of multiple regional competitions conducted throughout the U.S. and Canada each year, designed to simulate the physical demands of real-life firefighting while demonstrating the profession's rigor to the public. Competitors perform a series of five grueling tasks while wearing "full bunker gear" and breathing apparatus, just as they would in responding to a real fire. The series of events is often referred to as the "toughest two minutes in sports."

Team Norman Sonic depends on private sponsors and fundraisers to provide the equipment, supplies and fares needed to join in the competition. Team sponsors include Norman Sonic Restaurants; Roy Oliver and Gregg Byram; Norman Wal-Mart Stores; The Steve Owens Group; First American Bank and Top of the World.

To find out more about the Firefighter Combat Challenge, visit American Bank and Top of the World.

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