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- Delphi

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- Sports column
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- Real Estate Guide
- Cars

Firefighters compete in combat challenge

By **JENNIFER KOVACS** *Tribune Chronicle*

GIRARD — You might not think that a two-minute-long competition would be all that grueling.

But just tell that to two city firefighters training for the upcoming Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge.

“You get a lot done in two minutes,” Steve Drake said.

Drake, along with Bryan Iceman, have signed on to be a tandem team and individual competitors in the regional portion of the nationwide competition that will be held this year on Oct. 5 and 6 in Akron. Those who qualify during that round will make it to nationals and then possibly to the world championship.

Those last big ticket bouts have even been aired on ESPN.

But the potential for fame and glory wasn’t really what inspired the two to take part.

Iceman, 31, has competed by himself the last four years, unable to convince anyone to join him in the challenge.

“I don’t claim to be excellent at it by any means. It gives me a reason to work out and stay in shape,” he said.

Since he started, Iceman has actually lost 60 pounds and uses the event to keep him motivated throughout the year.

“It’s sort of addicting,” he said.

Then the new guy came along.



Tribune Chronicle / Jennifer Kovacs

Bryan Iceman, right, hoists a hose by rope from the top of an extended ladder truck as Steve Drake watches. The two are in training for the annual Scott Firefighter Combat Challenge, to be held Oct. 5 and 6 in Akron for a shot at competing for the national title. See more photos on CU by visiting cu.tribune-chronicle.com

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Drake, 26, joined the Girard department about six months ago. And soon enough, Iceman began hitting him with his sales pitch.

“It didn’t take long,” Drake said.

Never pulling out any great times by himself before, Iceman said he’s looking forward to seeing how he’ll fare on a two-man team.

“We should do fairly well as long as Steve can run up the stairs fast,” Iceman laughed.

And going up those stairs is only one portion of what makes up that two minutes of pain.

In full turnout gear, meaning suited up with an air pack and all, competitors must first carry a 45-pound hose up six flights of stairs. That’s not the end of it, though.

A series of five tasks must be completed, including hoisting, chopping, dragging hoses and pulling a 175-pound dummy to safety.

“It takes a lot out of you,” Iceman said.

Just weeks away from the real deal, the two couldn’t really say yet whether they make good teammates. Working different shifts at the station, they don’t get to see each other too often.

But during a recent afternoon practice, Iceman offered some tips to Drake as he tried his hand at a few hose hoists. Then, of course, Iceman cracked some jokes, too, as his teammate worked to untangle the knots he put in the rope during the trial run.

Drake is no novice, though. Having taken part in a couple agility training tests in Cleveland, he’s finished courses similar to the one where they’ll be competing.

“I know I can do it. But in a time challenge, I don’t know what my time will be,” he said.

And while Iceman said that the toughest part is just finishing, Drake offered that the biggest challenge in that situation may be a bit more simple.

“Standing,” he said.

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